

# BIRD OBSERVER

OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS



APRIL 1985

Vol. 13 No. 2



# BIRD OBSERVER

## OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

**APRIL 1985**  
**VOL. 13 NO. 2**

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## BIRD OBSERVER SPRING AND SUMMER COURSES

- BIRD SONG - Focus on migrant and breeding bird songs.  
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- NESTING TERNS AND GULLS - Identification of adults and immatures,  
and a look at the breeding ecology.  
Seminar: Thursday, July 18, 7:30 to 9:30 P.M.,  
Babson College, Wellesley.  
Field Trip: Saturday, July 20, Monomoy.  
Leader: Wayne R. Petersen      Cost: \$25 plus ferry fee
  
- SHOREBIRDS - A seminar and two field trips to cover adult and  
juvenile migrations.  
Seminar: Friday, July 26, 7:00 to 10:00 P.M.,  
Babson College, Wellesley.  
Field Trip #1: Saturday, July 27, Plum Island.  
Field Trip #2: Saturday, August 24, Scituate.  
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May 31 - June 2 or September 6 - 8, 1985

A few places are still available on the June and September pelagic trips to Georges Bank and Hydrographer Canyon. The trips leave Gloucester at 7:00 P.M. and return 43 hours later. The trip leader for both trips will be Wayne Petersen. The cost for either trip is \$250 per person which includes meals and accommodations aboard ship. To reserve your spot, please send a \$50 deposit (\$25 nonrefundable) to the BOEM Program Coordinator, Martha Vaughan, 15 Elmwood Park, Newton, MA 02160. Make checks payable to BIRD OBSERVER. If you have any questions, call Martha Vaughan at 617-244-0166.

*Register now!*

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## BIRDING PLYMOUTH BEACH

by Duncan S. Evered, Manomet Bird Observatory

Although Plymouth Beach does not enjoy a reputation as a "hot spot" for rare birds, increased coverage by field observers in recent years has produced an impressive list of rarities at all seasons. Plymouth Beach may well be the sleeper of the Massachusetts coast.

Bruce Sorrie wrote the above in summary to an article that appeared twelve years ago in *Bird Observer*, volume 1, May-June 1973. Evidently, for many Massachusetts birders the location of Plymouth Beach (between the Cape and Plum Island, but not close enough to either) and the logistics of getting out there and back (walk six miles or use an off-road vehicle) still prove too much of an effort. Consequently, Plymouth Beach still does not enjoy the recognition it surely deserves. The purpose of this article is to show that Plymouth Beach "sleeps" no more: since Bruce's prophecy, over fifty additional species have been documented. First, as a testimony to this area's pedigree, I present a fully researched list of the 243 species reliably recorded from 1945 to 1984 in the area defined in the accompanying figure. A detailed annotation then follows, offering any birder who wishes to discover Plymouth Beach the advantage of better knowing where and when to look.

In a broader ecological perspective, leaving rarities like Burrowing Owl and Sharp-tailed Sandpiper aside, Plymouth Beach is of major importance to literally tens of thousands of wintering waterfowl and migratory shorebirds, over a thousand nesting terns, and a valuable few struggling pairs of Piping Plover. How long Plymouth Beach will maintain such an impressive concentration and diversity of avian forms will depend on the amount of future interest taken in this exciting place.

### THE SPECIES LIST.

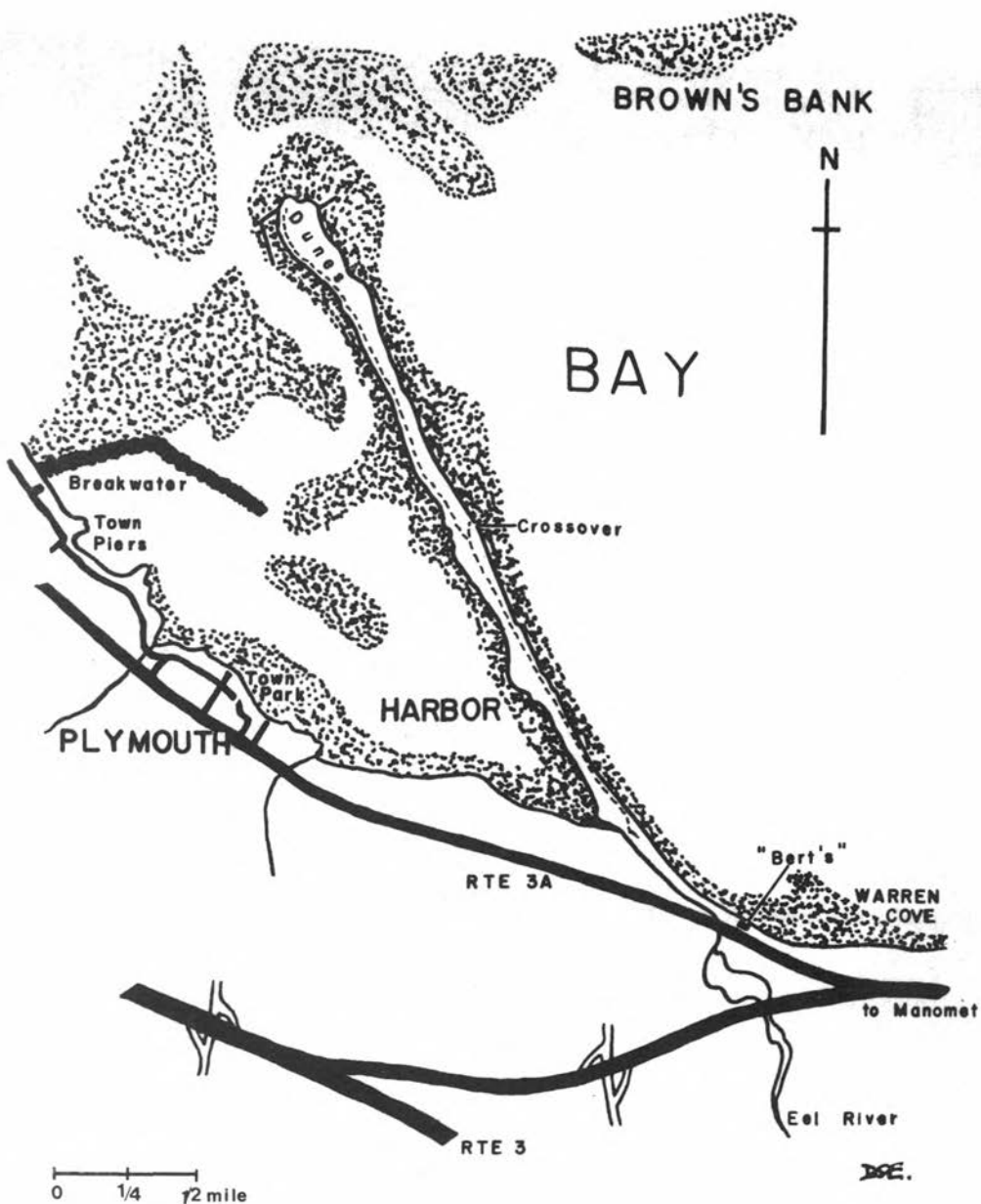
In order to fully understand this birdlist, it is necessary to explain some of the arbitrary conventions used in its compilation. Average abundance during the season when the species is most frequent is indicated as follows: C = common (should be seen), U = uncommon (might be seen), R = rare (worth looking for), and V = very rare or vagrant (recorded on one or two occasions, i.e., apparently exceptional). These four simplified categories are used to convey the chances of a species being seen in ideal conditions by a knowledgeable observer. Therefore, the abundance rank selected for each species not only depends on its average numerical abundance, but also on its conspicuousness and the awareness of the observer.

Seasonal occurrence is indicated as follows: S = summer, M = migration, and W = winter. A capitalized symbol marks the season of most frequent occurrence (to which the above abundance ranking - C, U, R, or V - refers), and a lowercase symbol indicates a lesser occurrence. The migration period of each species occurring on Plymouth Beach is typical of other south shore locations, and an asterisk denotes proven breeding on Plymouth Beach. [Ed. note: the author has chosen not to use the term "resident" bird, and "migration" is broadly used here to include post-breeding dispersal.]

Species List for Plymouth Beach and Environs.

SPECIES	STATUS	SEASONAL ABUNDANCE	SPECIES	STATUS	SEASONAL ABUNDANCE
Red-throated Loon	C	Mw	Ruddy Duck	V	W
Arctic Loon	V	M	Turkey Vulture	V	M
Common Loon	C	Mw	Osprey	U	M
Pied-billed Grebe	R	mW	Amer. Swallow-tailed Kite	V	M
Horned Grebe	C	Mw	Bald Eagle	R	sMw
Red-necked Grebe	U	mW	Northern Harrier	U	Mw
Western Grebe	V	W	Sharp-shinned Hawk	R	Mw
Northern Fulmar	R	M	Red-shouldered Hawk	R	Mw
Cory's Shearwater	R	M	Red-tailed Hawk	R	mW
Greater Shearwater	R	sM	Rough-legged Hawk	R	W
Sooty Shearwater	R	M	American Kestrel	*C	sMw
Manx Shearwater	V	S	Merlin	U	Mw
Wilson's Storm-Petrel	U	Sm	Peregrine Falcon	U	M
Leach's Storm-Petrel	V	M	Gyr Falcon	V	M
Northern Gannet	U	sMw	Northern Bobwhite	R	W
Great Cormorant	C	smW	Clapper Rail	R	sMw
Double-crested Cormorant	C	sMw	King Rail	V	M
American Bittern	R	M	Virginia Rail	U	mW
Least Bittern	R	M	Sora	U	M
Great Blue Heron	U	sMw	American Coot	R	W
Great Egret	U	Sm	Sandhill Crane	V	M
Snowy Egret	C	Sm	Black-bellied Plover	C	Mw
Little Blue Heron	U	Sm	Lesser Golden-Plover	U	M
Tricolored Heron	R	Sm	Wilson's Plover	R	M
Cattle Egret	R	S	Semipalmated Plover	C	M
Green-backed Heron	R	sM	Piping Plover	*U	Sm
Black-crowned Night-Heron	C	Smw	Killdeer	*C	sM-v
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	R	Sm	American Oystercatcher	R	Sm
Glossy Ibis	U	Sm	American Avocet	V	M
Mute Swan	C	smW	Greater Yellowlegs	C	M
Snow Goose	R	Mw	Lesser Yellowlegs	U	M
Brant	C	Mw	Solitary Sandpiper	R	M
Canada Goose	C	Mw	Willet	U	M
Wood Duck	R	M	Spotted Sandpiper	*C	Sm
Green-winged Teal	U	Mw	Upland Sandpiper	R	M
American Black Duck	C	mW	Whimbrel	U	M
Mallard	C	Mw	Hudsonian Godwit	R	M
Northern Pintail	R	Mw	Marbled Godwit	V	M
Blue-winged Teal	U	M	Ruddy Turnstone	C	Mw
Gadwall	R	Mw	Red Knot	C	Mw
Eurasian Wigeon	V	mW	Sanderling	C	Mw
American Wigeon	U	mW	Semipalmated Sandpiper	C	M
Canvasback	R	W	Western Sandpiper	U	M
Redhead	R	W	Least Sandpiper	C	M
Ring-necked Duck	R	W	White-rumped Sandpiper	U	M
Greater Scaup	U	Mw	Baird's Sandpiper	R	M
Lesser Scaup	R	W	Pectoral Sandpiper	C	M
Common Eider	C	mW	Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	V	M
King Eider	R	W	Purple Sandpiper	R	Mw
Harlequin Duck	V	W	Dunlin	C	Mw
Oldsquaw	C	Mw	Curlew Sandpiper	R	M
Black Scoter	U	Mw	Stilt Sandpiper	R	M
Surf Scoter	C	Mw	Buff-breasted Sandpiper	R	M
White-winged Scoter	C	Mw	Ruff	R	M
Common Goldeneye	C	mW	Short-billed Dowitcher	C	M
Barrow's Goldeneye	R	W	Long-billed Dowitcher	R	M
Bufflehead	C	mW	Common Snipe	U	Mw
Hooded Merganser	R	mW	American Woodcock	V	M
Common Merganser	R	mW	Wilson's Phalarope	R	M
Red-breasted Merganser	C	Mw	Red-Necked Phalarope	U	M

SPECIES	STATUS	SEASONAL ABUNDANCE	SPECIES	STATUS	SEASONAL ABUNDANCE
Red Phalarope	R	M	Black-capped Chickadee	U	Mw
Pomarine Jaeger	V	M	Tufted Titmouse	U	mW
Parasitic Jaeger	R	M	Marsh Wren	U	sMw
Great Skua	V	M	Golden-crowned Kinglet	R	M
Laughing Gull	C	sM	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	U	M
Little Gull	R	M	Northern Wheatear	V	M
Common Black-headed Gull	R	sMw	Swainson's Thrush	R	M
Bonaparte's Gull	C	Mw	American Robin	U	sM
Mew Gull	V	W	Gray Catbird	U	Mw
Ring-billed Gull	C	sMw	Northern Mockingbird	C	sMw
Herring Gull	C	sMw	Water Pipit	C	Mw
Iceland Gull	R	mW	Cedar Waxwing	R	Mw
Lesser Black-backed Gull	R	Mw	European Starling	*C	sMw
Glaucous Gull	V	W	Philadelphia Vireo	V	M
Great Black-backed Gull	C	sMw	Red-eyed Vireo	R	M
Black-legged Kittiwake	U	Mw	Golden-winged Warbler	V	M
Sabine's Gull	V	M	Tennessee Warbler	R	M
Gull-billed Tern	V	M	Nashville Warbler	R	M
Caspian Tern	U	M	Yellow Warbler	U	M
Royal Tern	R	Sm	Magnolia Warbler	R	M
Sandwich Tern	R	M	Yellow-rumped Warbler	C	Mw
Roseate Tern	*C	sM	Black-throated Green Warb.	R	M
Common Tern	*C	Sm	Palm Warbler	U	M
Arctic Tern	*C	S	Bay-breasted Warbler	R	M
Forster's Tern	U	M	Blackpoll Warbler	U	M
Least Tern	*C	Sm	American Redstart	R	M
Sooty Tern	V	M	Northern Waterthrush	R	M
Black Tern	U	M	Connecticut Warbler	V	M
Black Skimmer	U	Sm	Common Yellowthroat	U	M
Dovekie	R	Mw	Wilson's Warbler	R	M
Thick-billed Murre	R	W	Northern Cardinal	U	smW
Razorbill	R	W	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	V	M
Rock Dove	C	Smw	Dickcissel	V	M
Mourning Dove	C	sMw	Rufous-sided Towhee	R	Mw
Black-billed Cuckoo	V	M	American Tree Sparrow	U	Mw
Great Horned Owl	R	S	Chipping Sparrow	R	M
Snowy Owl	R	Mw	Field Sparrow	R	M
Burrowing Owl	V	M	Savannah Sparrow	C	sMw
Short-eared Owl	U	Mw	"Ipswich" Sparrow	C	mW
Common Nighthawk	R	M	Sharp-tailed Sparrow	*U	sMw
Whip-poor-will	V	M	Seaside Sparrow	R	Mw
Chimney Swift	U	Sm	Song Sparrow	*C	sMw
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	V	M	Lincoln's Sparrow	R	M
Belted Kingfisher	U	sMw	Swamp Sparrow	U	Mw
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	R	M	White-throated Sparrow	U	Mw
Downy Woodpecker	U	smW	White-crowned Sparrow	R	M
Northern Flicker	U	Mw	Dark-eyed Junco	U	Mw
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	V	M	Lapland Longspur	C	Mw
Acadian Flycatcher	V	M	Snow Bunting	C	mW
"Traill's" Flycatcher	R	M	Bobolink	R	M
Western Kingbird	V	M	Red-winged Blackbird	C	sMw
Eastern Kingbird	R	M	Eastern Meadowlark	R	mW
Horned Lark	*C	sMw	Rusty Blackbird	R	M
Purple Martin	R	M	Common Grackle	C	M
Tree Swallow	*C	sM	Brown-headed Cowbird	U	M
No. Rough-winged Swallow	U	sM	Northern Oriole	R	M
Bank Swallow	U	sM	House Finch	C	sMw
Cliff Swallow	V	M	Common Redpoll	R	W
Barn Swallow	C	sM	Pine Siskin	R	W
Blue Jay	U	sMw	American Goldfinch	U	sMw
American Crow	C	sMw	House Sparrow	C	Smw
Fish Crow	R	Mw			



"Plymouth Beach" refers to the beach north of the parking lot at Bert's Restaurant and includes only the waters and flats visible from the beach itself, which broadly encompasses the harbor and part of Plymouth Bay.

I again take the liberty of quoting Bruce Sorrie almost verbatim, this time for his description of the logistics of birding Plymouth Beach. The best way to get to the beach is to drive south on Route 3 and take the exit marked "Plimoth Plantation - Manomet." Continue east about a mile and take a sharp left turn onto Route 3A toward Plymouth. Proceed north about one mile to Bert's Restaurant on the right, immediately north of which is the beach parking lot and road. In the summer (Memorial Day to school opening) unless your car has a "Town of Plymouth Facilities" sticker, you will have to pay for parking here. Plan to walk the beach and to set out at low tide (ideally at dawn for landbirds at the base of the beach) so that when you reach the tip of the beach, the tide is high for the best viewing of shorebirds and waterfowl.

The height above the beach together with the protection provided by the seawall makes the parking lot next to Bert's the most comfortable and convenient place to scan for loons, grebes, and pelagics. During strong nor'easters, loons and grebes often shelter in Warren Cove, and a walk south along the seawall is then advisable; otherwise they occur along the whole length of the bayside beach. October, from midmonth on, produces both the quantity, e.g., maxima of 80 Horned Grebes and 80 Red-throated and Common loons, and the quality, e.g., three species of loon together (see Field Records of October 1984 in BOEM, 13: 27). Typically only a dozen or so Horned Grebes and Common Loons stay the whole winter, the Red-throats normally leaving in January. During severe storms, on account of the waves that tumble over the seawall making serious sea-watching quite futile, it is usually best to go to Manomet Point, returning to the beach after the high winds have diminished somewhat. During such revisits, the outer beach, especially the tip, has produced resting and outward-bound "goodies" like Sabine's Gull, Sooty Tern (after Hurricane David), Leach's Storm-Petrel, and Pomarine Jaeger. Late summer and early fall most predictably produce (in order of frequency): Northern Gannet, Wilson's Storm-Petrel, Parasitic Jaeger, Red-necked Phalarope, and the large shearwaters. Late fall storms produce more gannets, Black-legged Kittiwake, the odd Northern Fulmar, and the exceptional Great Skua. Less is known of spring storms, but both phalarope species occur fairly regularly.

The large heronry on Clark's Island [see BOEM 10(3): 133], which lies two miles northeast of the beach, is the source of the wealth of waders that pace and stab in the harbor lagoons and channels throughout the summer. Low tide is the time to see good numbers of Snowy Egrets (up to 150 in late summer) and, possibly, Little Blue Heron and Great Egret. The mouth of the Eel River is a good place for close views when tides are intermediate, but the sun tends to produce severe glare here except in early mornings or on overcast days. Because of this, the best viewing sites are from points looking west from the harbor shore. Unfortunately, many roads leading to good vantage points are private, and unless specific permission has been granted in advance, birders should not use them. Those shown in the figure are accessible and worthy of a visit. During both spring and fall migrations, the numbers of waders decrease, but the rarer species occur with greater frequency. The less common waders, such as Cattle Egret and Glossy Ibis, are best seen from the tip of the beach winging their way to (evening) or from (morning) Clark's Island and their feeding grounds.

The established reputation of Plymouth Beach and Harbor as a site for abundant winter waterfowl results in their status being comparatively well-known. Brant have increased dramatically over the last decade. The wintering population is now over 1500; swelled with migrants in April and November, the total can exceed 5000. At high tide, truly impressive flocks gather on and around the sand flats at the tip of the beach, affording close study. However, they are easily disturbed; so approach with caution. At low tide the Brant join the eider as blurry dots on the expanses of sand and mussel flats - frustrating to the birder but an apt reminder of the abundant resources Plymouth Harbor offers to waterfowl. Of the ducks, small numbers (maximum of five) of Barrow's Goldeneye and the odd King Eider are the reliable attractions for the birder searching for the unusual. The Barrow's are best viewed from the Breakwater and Town piers at high tides from early December through March. The Kings may be with any of the 15,000 of more Common Eider that frequent the whole estuary. But despair not at the odds, for the Kings that are found tend to stay in the same flock and at the same general location for several weeks at a time. If you fancy streams of eider flying across a glowing sunset, try the tip of Plymouth Beach toward dusk. Mornings produce better, if somewhat less dramatic, lighting, but the spectacle is more likely to be tarnished by sportsmen. Concentrations of other sea and bay ducks in winter are generally modest, occasionally good, with scoter, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser and Oldsquaw dominating. Larger flocks can be seen in the distance from the parking lot during heavy migrations in October and November, but few depart from their course (Saqush Head in Duxbury to Manomet Point) and come to rest in the bay. The rarer puddle ducks occur briefly and sporadically during heavy migration and after the first major freeze-ups in December. The latter is also a time when the rare bay ducks (and American Coot) occasionally occur.

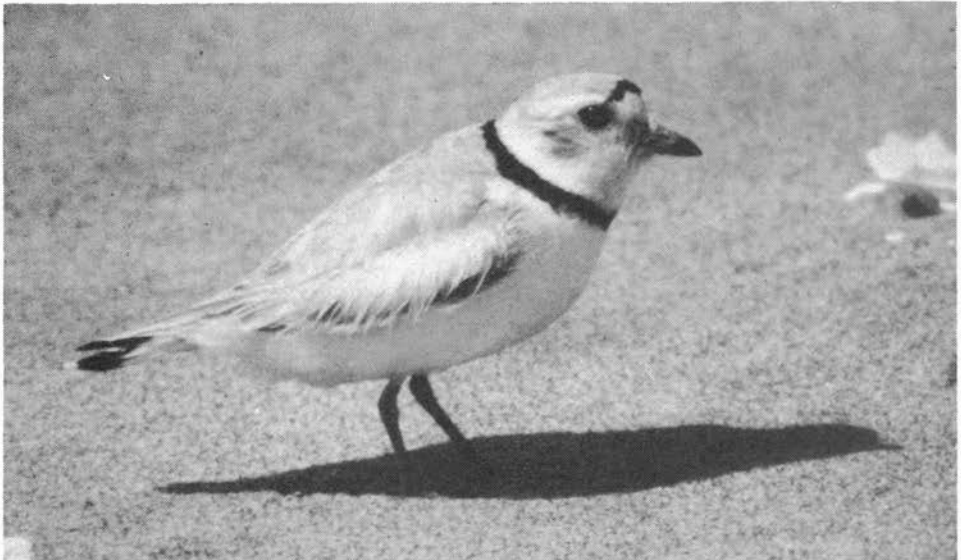
The only raptor nearly omnipresent on Plymouth Beach is the American Kestrel, one or more being seen almost without exception throughout the year. From September through October and into early November, either a Merlin or a Peregrine Falcon can be expected on all but the briefest, or unluckiest, of trips. Often the birds are seen hunting, but on a good number of occasions, especially in the late mornings, the birds are actively migrating. Twice in the last two years, Gyrfalcons have been seen racing along the beach in late fall. August and September are the times to watch for Ospreys fishing over the harbor or the pond across the road from Bert's. (This pond is always worth checking for feeding and resting ducks, gulls and terns, and a large icterid/swallow roost, with the best view from the height of the Pilgrim Sands Motel parking lot next to Bert's Restaurant.) Northern Harriers regularly quarter the harborside salt marshes and dunes in late fall and winter, routinely including Duxbury Beach across the bay to the north on their patrols. All other hawks prove very scarce in migration and irregular in winter. In recent summers and early falls, the Bald Eagle has become more regular.

Flood tides in fall are the best times to search for the ever elusive, but far from impossible, rails. Although the salt marshes on the west side of the harbor are still good despite some filling in, permission is essential to gain access to walk them. Therefore, the mouth of the Eel River at the base of Plymouth Beach, especially around the large clump



of reeds, is the site recommended. (Just after leaving the parking lot, a footpath leads from the track down a wash to the river and then follows it to the reed bed.) Sora is the most common, but Virginia and Clapper rails are often seen too and occasionally "jump up" for the Christmas Bird Count. Although not confirmed, it is possible that Clapper Rail surreptitiously breeds here. Walking this area in fall, or even winter, may also produce Sharp-tailed Sparrow, which nests in some years, and occasionally a Seaside. After nesting in the marshes surrounding the pond across from Bert's, a Marsh Wren or two might be found among the reeds, often lingering into early winter.

The huge expanses of sand and mud flats and mussel beds of Plymouth Harbor provide a tremendous amount of invertebrate food for shorebirds. Plymouth Beach provides the other essential component of a stopover site, a place for the birds to rest at high tide, making it one of the top ten "fueling" sites on the whole North American Atlantic coast according to the International Shorebird Survey. Intensive shorebird censusing over the last thirteen years by Manomet Bird Observatory staff has produced the following average peak fall migration numbers for the most common roosting species: Semipalmated Sandpiper (5000), Sanderling (1000), Dunlin (800), Black-bellied Plover (650), Semipalmated Plover (500), and Ruddy Turnstone (150). Red Knot and Short-billed Dowitchers now use the beach much less than they used to because of increasing human disturbance. Nevertheless, flocks of up to a thousand and more of both species still feed on the flats and sporadically visit the beach. Thus, despite human and vehicular activity, Plymouth Beach still boasts a great variety of shorebirds. Early October days routinely produce eighteen or nineteen species, and rarities are uncannily frequent, the most notable being the first Massachusetts record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (1971) and the regularity with which Wilson's Plover occurs in the shingle and gravelly areas at the tip of the beach in the latter part of April, May, and early June.



*Piping Plover*

*Photo by John H. Gavin  
Courtesy of MAS*

A falling tide is the best time to observe the shorebirds at their most dynamic, as they start feeding in the freshly created tidal pools adjacent to roosting sites before moving off to the emerging flats. In the early fall, roosts occur on the shingle stretches and the raised salt marsh along the harbor side of the beach, and these can be viewed without causing disturbance from several points along the beach road. On the rainier and cooler days of September and through the winter, in the absence of frequent human harassment, shorebirds (mainly Sanderling and Dunlin) are able to establish a regular roost on the comparatively deserted sandy beaches along the bay side and at the tip of the beach.

From late August through October, large gulls start to roost in substantial numbers (routinely a thousand birds and up to ten thousand associated with major fish kills) on the sand flats around the tip of the beach and on the bay side north of the crossover. In recent years Lesser Black-backed Gulls have proved to be regular in small numbers from August to October: four individuals in 1982 and at least five in 1984. (I'm sure nobody looked hard enough in 1983!) Although the size of these gull assemblages declines sharply in late October, gulls often rest on the beach in appreciable numbers during and immediately after storms in late fall and early winter. At such times, careful scrutiny occasionally yields an early Iceland, later perhaps a Glaucous or lingering Lesser Black-backed Gull. In winter, several hundred very approachable Ring-billed Gulls loaf around the Breakwater parking lot behind McGrath's Restaurant at high tide and on a receding tide are found in the salt marshes farther north. (Take a right from McGrath's and after two hundred yards another right as the road bears sharply left.) In early spring when numbers are swelled with northbound migrants, these flocks are worth checking carefully for Mew Gull (of the European race), which has occurred twice. The gulls in late spring and summer are much less numerous, but scanning along the sand flats has produced various larid oddities. A juvenile Common Black-headed Gull in July of 1984 and late spring Iceland Gulls take pride of place, ahead of several summer "white-winged" gulls, one of which was probably an albinistic or leucistic bird.

From early May until early August, the dunes at the tip of Plymouth Beach host one of the most important terneries within the Cape Cod "super-colony," both in terms of numbers (1114 pairs of Common Terns bred in 1984) and diversity (four species invariably breed). The colony in the past has suffered declines due to rat predation and natural food shortage, but now neither is significant. There is every reason to believe that with continued monitoring to control human disturbance, Plymouth Beach might assume its former significance (i.e., 7500 pairs in 1954). Indeed, the Plymouth colony is presently expanding, most likely through absorbing birds from the declining colony on Monomoy. Least Terns nest every year in small numbers (15-45 pairs) and in various parts of the beach depending on the location of an undisturbed pebbly substrate and the extent of the high spring tides. Arctic Terns have shown a recent decline, perhaps reflecting climatic change more than anything else as this species is on the southernmost edge of its range. Nevertheless, in 1984, the typical 40 percent of the total Massachusetts population was nesting in the low, mobile dunes and pebbly edges of the Plymouth Beach colony. Roseate Terns nest in variable, but usually small, numbers (6-50 pairs) in the densely vegetated dune "hollows" in the midst of the colony.



*Common Tern and Chick*

*Photo by Henry B. Kane  
Courtesy of MAS*

Large numbers of terns may be found resting around the northwest jetty at high tide, and in late July and early August very impressive flocks of terns may occur on the sand flats with up to 2000 Common Terns and 800 Roseates. At night roosts may number even more. These birds are mostly adults and probably originate from colonies in southern New England, dispersing north after breeding to fish the productive coastal waters around Cape Cod. At this time, and to a lesser extent in the spring, the rarer "southern" terns occur on the extensive bayside sand flats with surprising regularity, examples being Forster's, Royal, Sandwich, and Gull-billed terns, as well as Black Skimmer, which formerly bred sporadically. At such times, as many as seven species of tern may be seen on Plymouth Beach in a single day.

Snowy Owls, although rare, are well worth scanning the dunes for during the day or the salt marshes in the twilight hours, where they hunt shorebirds. The best times are in November and December and again in March and April when migrants pause a few days. The Short-eared Owl seems to have a strategy similar to its diurnal counterpart, the Northern Harrier, in that it regularly commutes between Plymouth and Duxbury beaches, often in response to disturbance. Although they are not a serious problem to the nesting terns, Great Horned Owls occasionally make hunting forays onto the beach from their surrounding suburban homes.

A cursory glance at the birdlist reveals that landbirds are rather poorly documented. In part, this is a reflection of Plymouth Beach not being a particularly good land trap for migrants due to its geographical position and the relative paucity of dense (and diverse) vegetative cover. But, in some part, it simply reflects the fact that in the past birders have not scrutinized the bushes thoroughly enough. Migrant landbirds may be quite numerous in the early morning before, having worked their way south to the base of the beach, they are lost in the relative wealth of cover found on the mainland. The birdlist clearly hints at the virtues of giving the loose thickets of Saltspray Rose and Beach Plum a "spish" or two - for a Dickcissel, a Golden-winged, or a Connecticut Warbler! The weedy patches of goldenrod and Dusty Miller regularly hold good numbers of Savannah Sparrows and Palm Warblers, so why not the odd Lark or Clay-colored sparrow? This is not to suggest that Plymouth Beach cannot offer anything of interest but the accidental Northern Wheatear or incidental Western Kingbird. The beach provides food and shelter on a regular basis for a number of interesting landbirds. Two or more pairs of Horned Larks breed each year north of the crossover. From mid-September on, Water Pipits are regular in their occurrence, with numbers occasionally exceeding fifty. The last days of September may produce early Lapland Longspurs in the dunes and along the harborside at low tide, with up to sixty in late October and November. Soon after the longspurs, the Snow Buntings arrive. But it is not until December that the dunes and bayside upper beach regularly have roving flocks of several hundred or more. Another attraction of the latter habitat is the presence of "Ipswich" Sparrows from mid-October to April, with as many as fourteen seen in one day.

As with all brief birding accounts, this is a fragmentary abstract of a location's avifauna. However, it is hoped that it will give the flavor of Plymouth Beach and illustrate its importance as a feeding, resting, and nesting place for birds - and, by encouraging a greater awareness of Plymouth Beach's value to our wildlife, create a stronger concern for its healthy persistence.

I thank all MBO staff and interns, past and present, whose notebooks and knowledge have been such an important source of information in the writing of this account. The birdlist is a complete revision of one prepared by Bruce A. Sorrie and Paul K. Donahue in 1975. Without their groundwork, and the critical assistance of Lyla R. Messick, the task of its compilation would have been more daunting. For help with specific enquiries and comments on drafts (+), I gratefully thank David E. Clapp, Trevor L. Lloyd-Evans (+), Brian A. Harrington (+), Lyla R. Messick (+), Wayne R. Petersen, P. William Smith, Bruce A. Sorrie, and Peter Trull.

DUNCAN S. EVERED, a visitor from England whose paper, "Pacific (and Arctic) Loon Identification," appeared in the February 1985 issue of BIRD OBSERVER, completed the work reported here during several periods of residence at Manomet Bird Observatory since 1982. Duncan has now transferred his research efforts to the Long Point Bird Observatory in Ontario, Canada.

## Massachusetts Rare Breeding Bird Inventory

As part of its ongoing inventory of rare plants and animals and unique natural communities, the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program is soliciting site-specific information on occurrences of a number of bird species that are considered endangered, rare, or declining in Massachusetts. It is particularly interested in monitoring population trends and documenting and mapping specific breeding sites for the following species:

Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Harrier, Common Moorhen, King Rail, Piping Plover, American Oystercatcher, Upland Sandpiper, Willet, Black Skimmer, Common Barn-Owl, Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Sedge Wren, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Loggerhead Shrike, Northern Parula, Golden-winged Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Vesper Sparrow.

Inventory information is maintained in a mapped and computerized data base and is used in environmental reviews, site protection planning, and the wildlife management and research activities of the Nongame and Endangered Species Program of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Field reports, as well as questions or requests for field forms, may be sent to: Dr. Scott Melvin, Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, 100 Cambridge St., Boston, MA 02202. Telephone: 617-727-3160.



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## THE 1984 SPRING MIGRATION WATCH

by John Andrews, Lexington

For the past five years, the BIRD OBSERVER Field Studies Committee has sponsored a cooperative data collection project during the spring migration. This article provides a brief summary of the results for 1984. It also presents some results of a computer analysis of data for all five years of the project.

Participants in the Spring Migration Watch (SMW) visit their chosen sites periodically during a period from April 15 to June 6. They follow a fixed route and record the numbers of all designated species present on each visit. The SMW now counts all species on the Massachusetts checklist from Rock Dove to House Sparrow.

Instructions for the SMW specify that all birds detected while traversing the route through the site are to be reported. The actual area that is effectively censused will depend upon the aural and visual acuity of the observer. It also depends upon the maximum distance at which each species can be detected. Because these variables are not controlled, the data must be viewed as providing indices of abundance rather than direct measures of species density. However, such indices are well suited for detecting trends in species abundance or detecting changes in the relative abundance of species. Conversion of the indices to measures of actual area density (such as birds-per-100 acres) is also possible by applying average conversion factors to data combined from many sites and observers.

### 1984 Results.

In 1984, eight data sets were received from sites in eastern Massachusetts. The sites and the observers were as follows: Provincetown Beech Forest (B. Nikula), Marblehead Neck Wildlife Sanctuary (C. Blaszcak), Mount Auburn Cemetery (F. Bouchard), Pond Meadow Park (R. Campbell), Bowen School in Newton (O. Komar), Webster Conservation Land in Newton (D. Komar), Norton's Woods in Cambridge (P. Stevens), and Bolton Flats (B. Parker).

Warbler abundances were examined by comparing birds-per-hour (BPH) values for 1984 with the values for 1980-83. Differences were considered statistically significant if they had less than one percent probability of occurring by chance. This analysis revealed that two species were low in 1984: Tennessee Warbler (0.322 BPH in 1984 versus 0.744 BPH in previous years) and Black-throated Green Warbler (0.618 versus 0.935). Higher values resulted for Cape May Warbler (0.486 versus 0.097), Black-and-white (2.321 versus 1.766) and Ovenbird (1.066 versus 0.612).

Observers were asked to note if, according to their subjective impressions, any species occurred in distinctly greater or lesser numbers than normal. There was no consistent pattern in their replies. At Mount Auburn, "all warbler species" were up, while at Beech Forest, the numbers of all species were considered low. Of 25 notes that mentioned



individual species, only Yellow-rumped Warbler was mentioned by two observers. They rated Yellow-rumped numbers as being low even though the BPH value for the count as a whole was higher than in previous years. It has been noted in previous years that observers at different sites seldom agree on which species are abnormally abundant in a given year. This may reflect the "patchiness" of bird distributions and the fact that weather patterns can concentrate migrants in different ways from year to year. It also points out the need to examine data from many sites before drawing any conclusions concerning year-to-year fluctuations in migrant density.

The maximum abundance for warblers occurred during the third week of May when 37.1 birds-per-hour were recorded. A strong migration of Magnolia Warbler and American Redstart was noted during the first week of June. The maximum seasonal species count for warblers was 26 species at Mount Auburn Cemetery followed by 24 at Marblehead Neck and Provincetown (Beech Forest).

#### Data Analysis by Computer.

Without an efficient means of storing and retrieving data, a long-term data collection effort such as the SMW would soon collapse under the accumulated mass of information. For this reason, a computer database has been created for SMW data. The importance of this database to the SMW and other projects of the Field Studies Committee is so great that it is worth some discussion. In a typical year, the SMW data sets involve approximately 160 site visits with up to 65 species reported from each site. Almost ten thousand data entries are then required just to identify the species counts for each site and date. Other data, such as time afield and descriptions of the site habitats must also be entered. As the database grows with each year of the project, hand analysis of the data becomes almost impossible. Fortunately, the personal microcomputers that are becoming increasingly commonplace are quite capable of storing and retrieving such quantities of data. They are also well-suited to volunteer projects since computer work can be done by individuals in their homes and combined later at a central facility.

The SMW database was created by using a word processing program to enter SMW data into text files. This format offered the greatest convenience for data entry and editing. A separate disk file was created for each year of the project. The files contained information on the time afield as well as the species counts. A data file for a complete year (8 data sets and an average of 60 species per site) required approximately 30 kilobytes of storage. Thus, a single floppy diskette with 380 kilobytes capacity can store about 12 years of data.

Programs for reading and analyzing the data were written in the Pascal computer language using the Turbo Pascal compiler by Borland International. This compiler is inexpensive (currently about \$56) and is available for all computers compatible with CP/M or IBM equipment. Each analysis program searches the data files stored on disk and accumulates the bird count data in a table of rows and columns. The type of analysis that results is determined by the manner in which data is

assigned to the rows and columns. For example, if it is decided that the rows will correspond to particular species and the columns to weeks of the year, the resulting table provides an analysis of how the abundance of each species varies from week to week.

As a further control upon the analysis, the user can specify a set of "filter criteria" that will be applied to the stored data before it is accepted for use. The filter criteria specify the sites, site latitudes, site longitudes, years, dates, and species to be used. For example, by a proper setting of the filter criteria, a user could conduct an analysis using only records of Dendroica warblers from outer Cape Cod. If no filtering criteria are specified, then the analysis programs use all available data.

DATA ENTRY IS A TIME-CONSUMING TASK. About an hour of keyboard time is required to enter yearly data for a single site. Additional time is required to prepare the data for entry, resolve questions concerning illegible or questionable entries, and check the data after entry. Thus far, only data for warbler species (Parulidae) have been entered. The Field Studies Committee is seeking volunteers to enter data for all species included in the project.

#### Timing of the Spring Warbler Migration.

One application of the SMW database is the study of the timing of the spring migration. Figure 1 is a plot of the principal components of the warbler migration resulting from combining SMW data from all five years. The birds-per-hour (BPH) values for each day are derived by summing the total number of individuals seen and dividing this by the total number of hours in the field. The first curve provides BPH values for Yellow-rumped Warbler. This early migrant is by far the most abundant warbler species seen during a spring count. The second curve depicts the BPH values for the principal breeding species: Yellow Warbler, Pine Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat. The third curve depicts the combined BPH values for all other warbler species. This group is composed mostly of migrant individuals.

It can be seen that averaging 5 years of data does not smooth all of the day-to-day irregularities due to weather conditions and random mixes of covered sites. However, several interesting features are evident in this figure. The early migration of the Yellow-rumped Warbler is clearly seen in the general shape of the first BPH curve that peaks between April 25 and May 5. By May 18, the Yellow-rumped migration is essentially complete. The general arrival of the breeding species between May 1 and May 10 is evident in the second curve. BPH values for breeders are fairly stable after this general arrival. The third curve shows that the abundance of migrant warblers increases sharply after May 5 and peaks between May 10 and May 20. There are, however, several late peaks in late May and early June. Because the database contains only a handful of visits in June, the BPH values for this period may be overestimated (due to observers going out only when they believe that weather conditions make a late wave of migrants likely). In the future we hope to stimulate more consistent coverage in early June so that the end of the migration period can be better defined.

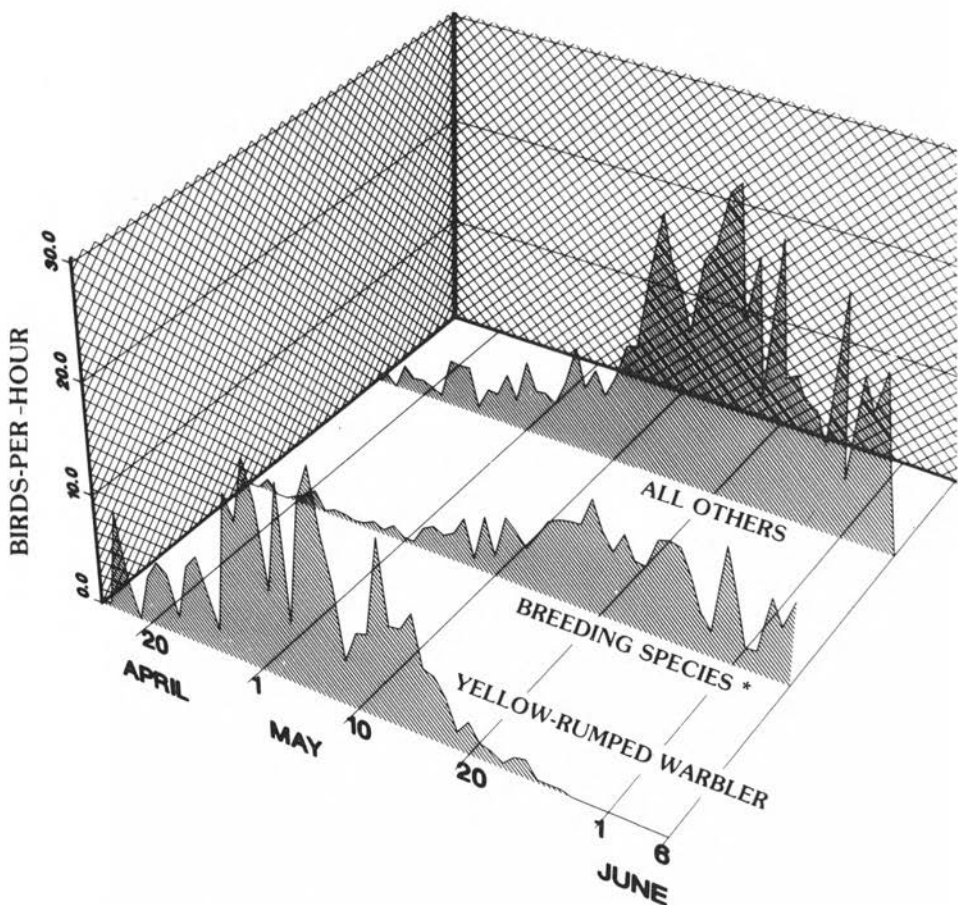


Figure 1. Birds-per-Hour Results for Warbler Species recorded on the Spring Migration Watches, 1980-1984.

\*Breeding species: Yellow Warbler, Pine Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat.

#### Site Analysis of Mount Auburn Cemetery.

An interesting analysis is obtained by computing weekly BPH values for each species at a selected site. Figure 2 is such an analysis for warbler species at Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge. The migration period is divided into weeks with four weeks for each month. The week is assigned a letter code according to the day of the month as follows: A=1 to 7, B=8 to 15, C=16 to 22, D=23 to 31. Thus any day between May 8 and May 15 would be in week 5B. Eight data sets from 1980 to 1984 were combined to produce this graph. These sets contained a total of 5205 individuals recorded during 180 hours afield.

SPECIES	MONTH/WEEK						
	4C	4D	5A	5B	5C	5D	6A
Blue-winged Warbler	-	-	0.525	0.804	0.276	0.354	-
Tennessee Warbler	-	-	0.068	1.311	2.724	1.550	0.750
Orange-crowned Warbler	-	0.056	-	0.105	0.103	0.044	-
Nashville Warbler	-	-	0.434	0.909	0.276	0.177	-
Northern Parula	-	-	1.735	3.164	1.310	0.664	-
Yellow Warbler	-	-	0.616	0.962	1.034	1.196	0.937
Chestnut-sided Warbler	-	-	0.091	0.612	0.414	0.708	0.750
Magnolia Warbler	-	-	0.046	1.189	1.655	0.576	0.750
Cape May Warbler	-	-	0.023	0.490	0.828	0.044	-
Blk-thr. Blue Warbler	-	-	0.274	0.909	0.586	0.044	0.187
Yellow-rumped Warbler	6.113	21.803	17.648	13.479	4.965	1.107	-
Blk-thr. Green Warbler	-	0.113	0.434	2.080	1.931	0.399	0.750
Blackburnian Warbler	-	-	0.046	0.629	0.862	0.266	0.750
Pine Warbler	0.226	0.507	0.046	-	-	-	-
Prairie Warbler	-	-	0.068	0.087	0.034	0.089	-
Palm Warbler	1.585	2.817	1.461	0.070	-	-	-
Bay-breasted Warbler	-	-	-	0.245	1.000	0.443	0.187
Blackpoll Warbler	-	-	-	0.769	2.241	3.188	1.312
Blk-and-white Warbler	-	0.282	3.562	4.108	2.414	1.063	0.562
American Redstart	-	-	0.297	1.469	3.793	3.454	3.187
Worm-eating Warbler	-	-	0.068	-	0.069	0.089	-
Ovenbird	-	-	-	1.381	0.379	0.354	0.187
Northern Waterthrush	-	0.056	0.228	0.315	0.103	0.044	-
Mourning Warbler	-	-	-	-	-	0.089	-
Common Yellowthroat	-	-	0.091	0.927	2.241	1.948	1.125
Hooded Warbler	-	-	0.023	0.087	-	0.044	-
Wilson's Warbler	-	-	-	0.332	0.690	0.443	0.375
Canada Warbler	-	-	-	0.245	1.034	0.531	2.250
COMBINED BPH:	7.92	25.63	27.79	36.68	30.97	18.91	14.06
HOURS AFIELD:	4.42	17.75	43.80	57.20	29.00	22.58	5.33
VISITS:	3	13	29	33	19	15	2
SPECIES/VISIT:	1.7	2.6	5.7	12.2	13.4	9.3	12.0

Figure 2. Weekly Birds-per-Hour Results for Migrant Warblers at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge (1980-84 SMW). (5205 individual records, 180 total hours afield)

In addition to Mount Auburn Cemetery, site analyses have been produced for Beech Forest (Provincetown), Marblehead Neck Wildlife Sanctuary, and Pond Meadow Park (Braintree). A copy of any of these analyses can be obtained by sending a long self-addressed, stamped envelope to John Andrews (address below).

### Conclusion.

The value of the SMW data increases with each year of the project and with each additional site covered. In the coming year, we expect to produce more sophisticated analysis programs and to study site-to-site variations in some detail. Additional volunteers are needed to assist in both data collection and data reduction. BIRD OBSERVER readers who are interested in helping in any way are urged to contact John Andrews (22 Kendall Road, Lexington, MA 02173, Tel. 617-862-6498).

Acknowledgments: In addition to the site observers mentioned in the article, the Field Studies Committee would like to thank Lee Taylor for his assistance in data analysis.

JOHN ANDREWS is a research engineer at an M.I.T. laboratory. He is chairman of the BIRD OBSERVER Field Studies Committee, and his ornithological interests include habitat utilization, population dynamics, and bird behavior. He is active in the Sierra Club and in local conservation groups.

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## WORDS FROM BEL AIR, MARYLAND

On March 25, 1984, a Mew Gull was reported at Falmouth by a group of observers and the following details were published in the field records of Bird Observer [12(3): 166].

Ring-billed Gulls were nearby for comparison, and the bird was slightly smaller and had a shorter, thinner, brighter yellow bill which was unmarked. The head was smaller and more rounded. Head, neck and body were white with some gray streaks on the head and neck. The mantle was similar to the Ring-billed's. Leg color was a brighter, more intense yellow. The orbital ring was red, and the eye color was a pale yellowish-tan. The spots on the primary tips of the folded wings were larger, and the area of white between the black of the tips and the gray of the back or coverts was wider.

The following letter from Eirik A. T. Blom was received by the Field Records Committee of BIRD OBSERVER, and permission to reprint it has generously been given by the author.

August 13, 1984

Dear Sirs:

I am sure this is not the first or last letter concerning the record of a "Mew" Gull in Falmouth on March 25, 1984.

Since I was not present, I can only judge the record on the basis of the published notes. Of course, other researchers and records committees have the same problem. Still, despite fairly short notes (which is not to say that more were not submitted), it is possible to reach some conclusions.

The first and most important is that the observers did not see a Mew Gull (Larus canus), or if they did, it was so aberrant as to be unidentifiable in the field, in range or out. Mew Gulls of all races have dark eyes, appearing black in the field. Any gull with a "pale yellowish-tan" eye cannot be a Mew. I suspect the villain in the case was the unmarked yellow bill. I have seen Ring-billed Gulls (Larus delawarensis) with unmarked or apparently unmarked yellow bills on at least four occasions in Maryland. On two occasions, photographs were obtained by Robert F. Ringler (3501 Melody Lane, Baltimore, Md 21207).

This is an excellent example of why single field marks, no matter how presumably diagnostic, should not be used to identify out-of-range birds. An examination of the other characters described in the note is instructive. It suggests how easy it is to overvalue the importance of slight differences when an identification seems settled.

The bird is described as "slightly smaller" than nearby Ring-bills with a "shorter, thinner, brighter yellow bill." The head is noted as "smaller and more rounded." Mew Gulls are smaller than Ring-bills, but there is considerable variation in both species. On average, Mews appear noticeably smaller than Ring-bills. Only a very large Mew would look "slightly" smaller than all the Ring-bills in a



nearby flock. Bill size and shape are the most distinctive clues to Mew Gulls. Again, only on the largest Mew (probably European or Siberian in origin) would the bill approach the length and thickness of a small Ring-bill. The shape, not described, would still be typical of Mew. Depending on the individuals involved, the bill is likely to be brighter yellow on Ring-bill than Mew. Mews have smaller and more rounded heads, and the difference is fairly striking on most birds. Mews are "dove-headed," and the dark eye is large and prominent.

The mantle of Mew Gulls is not "similar" to Ring-bills. It is visibly darker. Even accounting for individual variation, any Mew will look darker than any Ring-bill.

The size of the sub-apical spots on the primaries is different on the two species as is the shape of the spots. Just saying they are larger without specific description and comparison is not adequate to eliminate variation in Ring-bill. The same is true of the amount of white between the gray of the mantle and the black of the primaries.

In fact, no single field mark, except for the bill, points to Mew and several point to Ring-bill. Clearly, no matter what the bird is, aberrant characters need to be explained. Given the information available, I think the choice is clearly Ring-bill, with a rare but not unrecorded variation in bill pattern. I am unaware of any report of a Mew Gull with a pale eye. Notes from other observers and expanded notes from the original observer would shed more light on the issue.

Despite all the discussion about identification, my real concern is that the record is in print as a Mew Gull in one of the most deservedly respected bird journals in the country. Unless there is some explanation or recantation, the record will resurface again and again, muddying the waters of Mew Gull vagrancy and distribution in the United States.

This is intended in the friendliest possible manner. I have spent years studying and flubbing gulls (and continue to) and am immensely sympathetic to and admiring of anyone who tackles the problems of large, white-headed gulls. Nothing would please me more than to discover that there were clear, unequivocal photos of the birds in question and to have to eat gull from afar.

EIRIK A. T. BLOM, who served as one of two chief consultants for the 1983 National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America, has long had a particular interest in gulls. Eirik is director of the Maryland/D.C. Breeding Bird Atlas Project and chairman of the Maryland Rare Birds Records Committee. BIRD OBSERVER is grateful to Rick for calling attention to this record, and we will publish comments from our readers about his interpretation of this sighting.

Editor's Note: The observers of the March 25 gull are to be commended for submitting a report sufficiently detailed to permit evaluation after this lapse of time. The notes indicate the bird was thoroughly studied, and the pertinent details recorded while the sighting was fresh in the mind. It is not unusual for records to be re-examined after long periods of time (even years later), and this demonstrates the importance of reports that include the complete notes made in the field at the time of the sighting.

## MORE ON RECORDS OF BIRDS

by Dorothy R. Arvidson, Arlington

"Bird watching embraces individual enterprise on the one hand, collective effort on the other. Above all else, it is marked by a ready exchange of experience, by a high regard for truth, and by a conviction that wild birds express the most spectacular development of nature."

Joseph J. Hickey: Preface, A Guide to Bird Watching, 1943.

Surely no one has stated these precepts better. But what has this to do with the records of birds? Please bear with me. Bird Observer, since its inception in 1973, has been concerned here because this journal serves as an agency for Hickey's "ready exchange of experience." One of several ways that we accomplish this end is by publishing the monthly Field Records and by striving for accuracy in the compilation with, always, a "high regard for truth." And this process requires a prodigious expenditure of time, labor, and effort by a dedicated and entirely volunteer staff.

This effort will have been worthwhile if we succeed in creating, over a period of time, a reliable compendium of information about the changing status, migration, and seasonal occurrence of the birds of eastern Massachusetts. If birds can be regarded as a "litmus of the environment" (Roger Tory Peterson's words), then we must record their increase or decline in order to take remedial action. Birding is not a science, but it is a realm of activity where amateurs can make a real contribution to ornithology and environmental studies. One must have a reasonable level of birding skill to do this and must be a meticulous observer willing to abide by certain rules.

It is difficult to set up exact rules for identifying birds, but there are some techniques to be avoided, particularly if the sighting is to be entered in the records. *Identification by elimination* can lead one far astray, because the original premise about the group to which the bird belongs might be wrong, the observer's information incomplete, or the observation inadequate - failure to see a field mark does not always mean it isn't present. Still less reliable is *"postmortem" identification*. One should be suspicious of flashes of inspiration as to the identity of the bird that occur after you and the bird have parted company, especially if you rely on memory alone as you consult reference books. Furthermore, not every bird *can* be identified for reasons of poor conditions at the sighting, lack of information about plumages or habits, or aberrancy of the bird itself (extreme variation from the norm of the species).

Like most groups that work with field records, Bird Observer staff regularly receives complaints along the following lines. "What happened to my report of 22 Pine Siskins flying over? There haven't been any reports this year, so I should think you'd be glad to have that one." Or, "What about that early Snow Bunting I saw in the flock of House Sparrows?" And, "Whatever happened to the Pileated Woodpeckers reported from South Boston. Why aren't they in the field records?" Sometimes, the criticism takes another direction. One reader, an accomplished birder, feels that

Bird Observer "has been far too lenient in accepting undocumented records." He suggests that "they should come in a special section . . . called 'uncorroborated reports' as is done by the editors of the middlewestern prairie region of American Birds," and further decries the printing of reports of species such as Eurasian Wigeon without notation of sex or whether any details have been received. Another competent critic notes that our record coverage is very uneven, that there are areas of eastern Massachusetts that are almost never represented in the records.

The greatest problem for people who deal with bird records arises from the reports of unusual sightings. These are not the province of experts alone but may be reported by any of us. It was an alert beginner who provided the first Massachusetts' record of Townsend's Warbler and unknown "out-of-staters" who sighted (and fortunately, carefully photographed) the Spotted Redshank. Confirmation is a simple matter when a bird remains in an area long enough to be seen by numbers of qualified people or to be well-recorded on film or tape. But what of the bird that is seen only once, or very briefly, or by a single individual? Do we risk losing valuable data if such sightings are ignored or not recorded? And what about records of vagrants (Eurasian Siskin, Western Reef Heron, Jackdaws, and Tufted Ducks) that may well be escaped cage-birds? This issue was well-addressed by Richard Veit [see "Escapes Versus Vagrants: A Comment," Bird Observer 11(6): 309].

It may help us as observers and reporters of birds to review the traditional standards and criteria that formed the basis for the evaluation of records at the present time. In 1955 (not so long ago, actually) Griscom recommended for adoption in Massachusetts, an "excellent set of rules" that had been established by the New York State Bird Book Committee in that same year as criteria for examining bird reports being considered for state records. This "sensible set of criteria" defined three categories of records:

a. "Wholly Acceptable." This includes records supported by a fully documented, available specimen, by an unquestionable and documented photograph or motion picture, by a documented sound recording, by a specimen no longer available but previously verified by a competent authority and later released, by circumstantial evidence (nest, egg, or part of specimen). Finally, by a record of an *easily* identified species, supported by the *multiple* observations of *competent* observers and *appropriate as to date and place*.

b. "Acceptable," in which the rules for sight records are slightly relaxed. Records which do not meet these criteria are deemed questionable and *will not be considered without strong supporting evidence*.

c. "Unacceptable" under any circumstances are: A sight record of a species *difficult to identify, inappropriate as to date or place, for which no previous records exist, by a single observer*; a sight record of a species difficult to identify, regardless of date, place, or previous records, by an observer or observers of *unknown competence or known incompetence*; a record of any kind for which there is no documentation or supporting evidence; and a record of a species which might be an escaped or released cage-bird. [All the italics are mine.]

The foregoing is quoted from Ludlow Griscom and Dorothy Snyder: The Birds of Massachusetts - An Annotated and Revised Check List, Peabody Museum, Salem, 1955, pages 9-10. Records committees have struggled over the years to maintain these rigorous standards with more or less success, and probably some notable records have fallen by the way. Richard Forster can recall in his personal records a Bell's Vireo in Marblehead Neck on May 16, 1964, and a LeConte's Sparrow in Wellesley that he did not report: they did not constitute acceptable records under that system of evaluation. Granted that no system is perfect. Is there any reasonable solution? Many avian records committees have accepted a system based on "details provided" by the observers, and a common complaint of compilers is that "no details were submitted." WESTERN Tanager asks in the March 1984 issue, "Could it be that *so many birders do not make notes* on rare or unusual species? Is it that so many participants . . . do not know how to report the sighting with details?" [C. Bernstein, "Details on Details," Western Tanager 50(6): 1-3.] Again, the italics are mine.

The highly respected journal, British Birds, has listed all the details that ideally should be noted and reported for any unusual sighting. These field notes fall into three categories.

1. *NOTES TAKEN WHILE THE BIRD IS IN VIEW.* (This assumes that every birder carries with him a field notebook or tape recorder.) These notes include a description of the form and structure of the head, bill, legs, wings, and tail compared to similar species; the bird's size and how it was determined - by estimation, measurement, or comparison; All distinctive markings of white or color; the entire plumage; color of eyes, bill, legs and feet; actions and flight, also compared to similar species; vocalizations; and a *field sketch!*

2. *NOTES TAKEN AFTER THE BIRD HAS DEPARTED OR BEEN LEFT UNDISTURBED.* Here should be noted associated birds; magnifying instruments used and their power; other factors affecting the observation (time of day, light and its direction, wind, and visibility); angle of view (above or below, etc.), whether the bird was at rest or in flight, and whether entirely visible or partly obscured; and finally, the length of the observation.

3. *DETAILS GIVEN IF THE RECORD IS SUBMITTED.* This includes the observers' prior experience with the bird and other species with which it may be confused; the steps you took to obtain confirmation by experienced observers; and *names of accredited birders to vouch for you*, should you be unknown or an inexperienced birder.

Although the above is more graciously stated, requirements are not so very different in England from what was expected by Griscom. Taking the initiative and responsibility for providing such a field report is the contribution that can be made by the birder who is so fortunate as to encounter a rare bird. If you make an unusual sighting in Massachusetts, you should send to Ruth Emery a written report (to insure that the sighting is included in the Records File), and a duplicate, including a xerox of your field notes and sketch, should be given to Mass. Audubon or any member of the Records ("Rare Birds") Committee. The present members of this group are James Baird, Paul Buckley, Richard Forster (chairman), Rick Heil, Chris Leahy, Blair Nikula, Wayne Petersen, Bruce Sorrie, Robert Stymeist, and Richard Veit. So, on your toes! Here's to good birding and conscientious reporting. And, may your next bird be a lifer - if not a rarity!

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## An Auction of Natural History Items

The South Shore Regional Office of the Massachusetts Audubon Society and W. Torrey Little, Inc., Auctioneer, are presenting an auction of natural history materials in August of 1985. This will be a full day dedicated to the resale of quality items that relate to our natural world. There are already two John James Audubon prints (Havell) and a set of *Birds of Massachusetts* (Forbush) committed to the auction.

This is an opportunity for you to consign any item that you have that is of reasonable value. It is presumed that first edition books, collections of field guides, works of art and other similar items will be gathered. The consignor will receive 90 percent of the hammer price for those items over \$500 in value and 85 percent for items under \$500. A 10 percent fee will be charged to the purchaser above the hammer price. Any items donated outright to the Society will be valued at the hammer price and are tax-deductible.

Please call the Massachusetts Audubon Society's South Shore Regional Office at (617) 837-9400 for information on entering pieces in the auction.

Catalogs should be available two or three weeks ahead of time. There will be a printing and mailing fee for the catalog. W. Torrey Little, Inc. will donate all proceeds, above expenses to the Society.



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## BOOK REVIEW

A Field Guide to Personal Computers for Bird Watchers and Other Naturalists by Edward M. Mair. 1985. Prentice-Hall, 208 pages, \$9.95.

Most avid birders are checklist addicts. It is not unusual to meet a birder who keeps a life list, a year list, a home town list, and a "my backyard" list. Others keep detailed field diaries that they hope will provide fresh insights into the habits and occurrences of their quarry. After a few years, keeping track of all this data can be an overwhelming task. But just imagine what could be done if these records were all in a computer. The birder asks the computer, "Where have I seen Snowy Owls in late February?" and the computer quickly gives him a detailed print-out of the requested information.

One of the more enthusiastic advocates of the personal computer in birding is Edward Mair, a Newburyport resident who organized the Newburyport Birder's Exchange to encourage the use of a personal computer as a birding tool. In this paperback book, Field Guide to Personal Computers, Mair provides an introduction to computer hardware and software with an eye to its potential for aiding the birder.

Anyone who is intimidated by the jargon of computing will appreciate Mair's excellent nontechnical explanations of the inner workings of computers. The book describes the most popular computer models and points out the features that are most important for typical birding applications. Mair recommends that a birding computer system have two disk drives, the CP/M or MSDOS operating systems, 64K of memory, and a dot matrix printer. Such a system would be difficult to assemble for less than \$1800, so obviously we are talking about a major step up from the familiar dogeared spiral notebook.

Many commercial software packages can be customized for birding applications. The same database program that a business uses to keep track of auto parts inventory can be used to keep track of bird sightings. Mair devotes a separate chapter to birding uses of the major types of computer software: word processing, database management, and spreadsheets.

The book has several weaknesses. Much space is wasted by mundane black-and-white photographs that have little relevance to the text (such as the one of a hummingbird with the caption, "Hummingbirds and personal computers have incredible powers"). Fortunately several of Julie Roberts' sensitive drawings are present to add visual charm to the pages.

Despite the availability of actual birding data from Christmas Bird Counts and hawk watches, Mair uses "fictional" data in most of his examples. This, together with a lack of attention to real-world problems such as data entry, lends a disturbingly hypothetical flavor to several of the computer applications Mair discusses.

The chapter on computer graphics is uninformative. It deals mostly with bar charts (which are scarcely better than tabular print-out in analyzing data) and ignores scatter plots, a much more powerful graphical technique that can reveal data patterns not detectable in print-out.



Many birders hope that their records can somehow result in genuine insights into species abundances, migration behavior, and other ornithological topics. Unfortunately, Mair has little to say on these more "scientific" applications where data validation, normalization, and statistical analysis become key issues.

Despite these shortcomings, the book will be of considerable value to the birder purchasing a personal computer for the first time, especially if he is interested mainly in using commercially available software to keep species checklists. Buying a personal computer is a tricky business. It's easy to be sold expensive extras that look great in the showroom but are never really needed at home. On the other hand, buying a machine with inadequate capabilities is a recipe for frustration. Mair's advice can increase the birder's odds of becoming a happy PC owner.

JOHN ANDREWS, the reviewer, is chairman of BIRD OBSERVER's Field Studies Committee. He uses personal computers professionally in engineering applications as well as in the analysis of Field Studies' data.



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ADULT ROSS' GULL AT NEWBURYPORT ON DECEMBER 3, 1984

by Stuart Tingley, Sackville, N. B., Canada

While scanning through roosting gulls in Newburyport Harbor from the Coast Guard station at the north end of Plum Island at about 1:30 P.M. on December 3, 1984, Juliet Bloss of Brooklyn, New York, (who was a participant on the WINGS Massachusetts Weekend I was leading in the area) called my attention to an adult Little Gull passing through the harbor at a moderate distance with a flock of Bonaparte's Gulls that she was observing through her 25X telescope. I quickly got on the flock with a 40X Questar telescope and immediately picked out the Little Gull by its uniformly dark underwings. But as I studied the bird, everything started looking wrong for that species. First of all, the wings seemed strongly angled and appeared much too long and pointed for Little Gull. Upon noticing this, I announced to the group that the Little Gull might indeed be a Ross' Gull. Everyone laughed - they thought I was joking(?) - and turned away to look at other things. Indeed, I couldn't believe what I had just said, yet my instinct was telling me that this was a Ross' Gull. I seriously considered just dropping it at this point as the bird was getting farther and farther away, flying almost directly away from us, and I knew the group was anxious to get to their cars to warm up and to buy some lunch material. As I continued to study the bird, other things became apparent. The bird wheeled and dropped to the surface a couple of times showing a long-tailed appearance, and when near the surface, the dark underwings seemed much paler. And, my God, wasn't that a pink blush I could see on the underparts? My pulse quickened, though I still literally couldn't believe my eyes. Finally the gull landed on the water with a number of Bonaparte's Gulls a great distance away and seemingly close to the seawall in Newburyport. Again I nearly convinced myself to stop entertaining any thoughts of this being a Ross' Gull - but I decided to go for it! I turned to the group and announced that, indeed, I was serious, that there was a chance that I had just been following a Ross' Gull and that we should drive to the seawall in Newburyport to search for the bird. Everyone gasped and agreed.

Upon arriving, we quickly located a group of 30 or 40 Bonaparte's Gulls sitting on the water just beyond an exposed flat, perhaps 300 metres away. Scanning through the flock with the Questar, I suddenly came upon the bird in flight just above the surface and flying away, but there was that wing shape again, and the underwings appeared a much lighter gray below than on adult Little Gulls, though still substantially darker than the upper surface. Suddenly the bird turned and gave me an excellent side on and top view as it wheeled around. The tail was distinctly wedge-shaped, and the pinkish blush to the underparts was very conspicuous. There was no longer any doubt! I screamed in excitement and collapsed on the seawall.

Pulling myself together, I relocated the bird sitting this time. On the water it appeared slightly smaller and paler-mantled than the Bonaparte's Gulls around it but looked longer-winged. But the most conspicuous difference was the head, which was overall much whiter and cleaner than the Bonaparte's Gulls, with a very large-eyed appearance caused by areas of black adjacent to the eye. Otherwise, no dark areas or markings

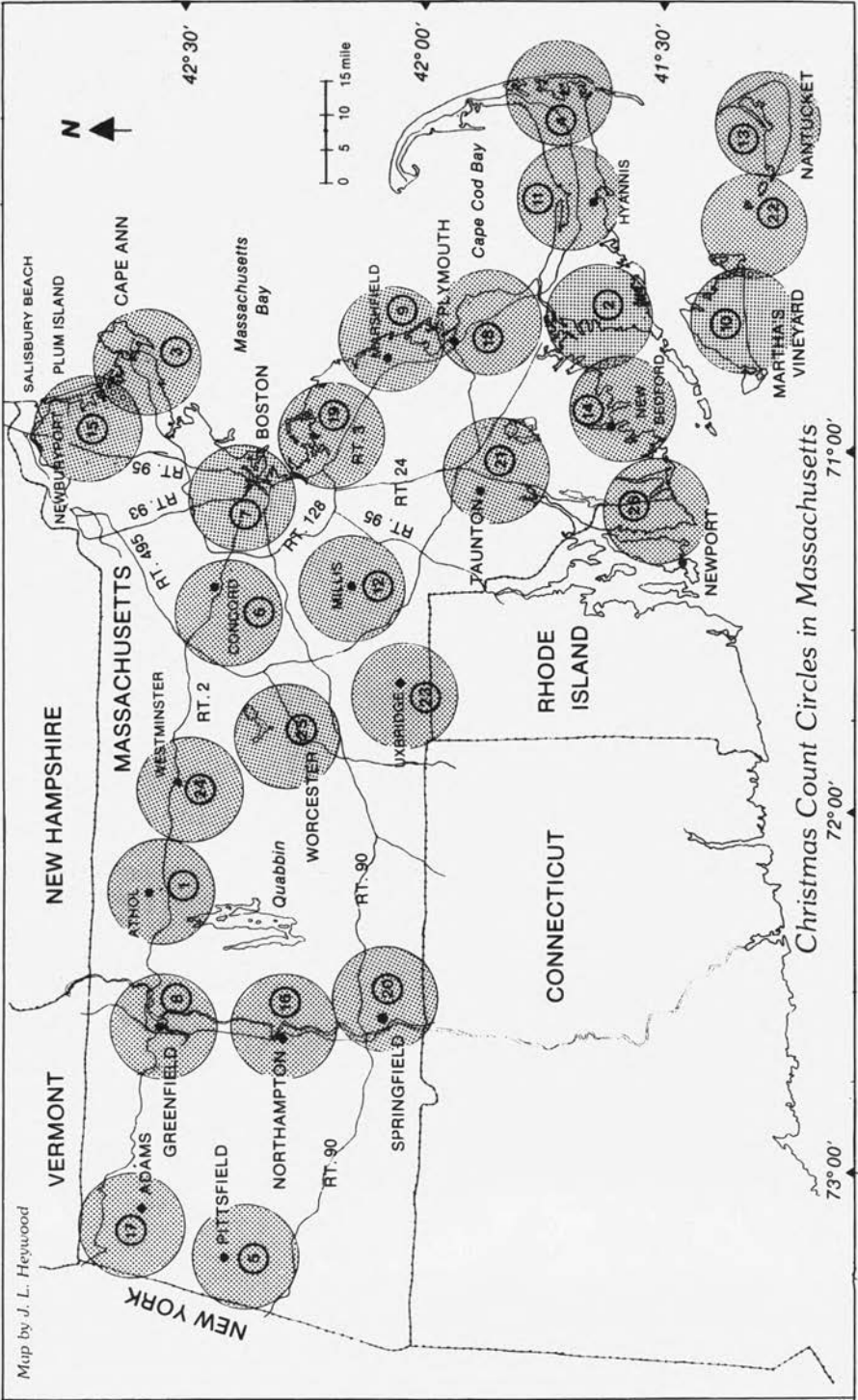
were apparent on the head. I checked this point repeatedly. The pink suffusion was noticeable on the breast and may have extended onto the face. The bird then lifted off and started flying around. I turned the Questar over to Juliet Bloss who had an excellent study of the bird in flight and immediately agreed with the identification. The bird was far enough away that the others in the group, using only binoculars, were not able to distinguish it from among the many other gulls in the immediate vicinity. For the next ten minutes, I repeatedly relocated the gull which was making short flights and re-landing, getting it in the Questar and stepping aside to let others view. Alas, the only other tour participant who managed to see the gull at all well was William Van der Mehden of Redding, California. A young couple who were scoping the flats when we arrived at the seawall and who had come running over upon hearing my scream of joy also said they were getting good looks at the gull through their standard telescope but disappeared up the road to get a closer view of the gull and "make a phone call" - before I had a chance to talk to them. After several frustrating minutes of trying to get other tour participants onto the gull through the Questar, I decided to scope an adult Common Black-headed Gull that I had earlier noticed standing on a bar somewhat nearer, for I knew several participants wanted to see it as we had missed it earlier in the weekend. This was a mistake, for when we resumed the search for the Ross' Gull, it had disappeared. Despite searching the harbor from Salisbury Beach and, later, again from the seawall, we were not able to relocate the bird.

I have been leading birding tours for WINGS, Inc. since 1980 and have seen Ross' Gulls many times at Churchill, Manitoba, and also once in the Northwest Territories at Prince Leopold Island. Juliet Bloss is, in my opinion, a very sharp and experienced birder, and she has seen Ross' Gulls at Churchill also.

STUART TINGLEY, well-known young tour leader and Canadian birder, is Northeast Maritime regional editor for the nesting season for American Birds. In that capacity, his writing is of necessity restrained by well-defined editorial and substantive rules. The above presentation, obviously written in the full flush of excitement over a "rare bird" sighting, demonstrates how the form of a field account is less important than the inclusion of all the essential facts, written while memory and images are still fresh in the observer's mind. So that our readers might share the excitement and still learn the components of a creditable field report, BIRD OBSERVER obtained permission from Stu to reprint his letter, originally sent to Richard Forster of the state Records Committee at Mass. Audubon.

In 1975, a Ross' Gull at Newburyport brought birdwatchers nationwide flocking to the area. A difficult bird to find, the only reliable spot to see it at that time was cold, inhospitable Point Barrow, Alaska. The species has since been reported from British Columbia, Newfoundland, Chicago, Colorado, Connecticut, and Newburyport (1981). Ross' Gull was found nesting in northern Canada in 1977 and in Churchill, Manitoba since 1980. It is a small (12 inches) gull with gray wings and back and a narrow white border on the hind edge of the wing, a small, rounded, dove-like head with a short, black bill and is usually seen in the company of Bonaparte's Gulls. The characteristic feature (unique among gulls) is a wedge-shaped tail, seen only in flight.

Map by J. L. Heywood



## THE 1984 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS IN EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

by Robert H. Stymeist, Watertown

The Eighty-fifth Annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) sponsored by the National Audubon Society was held from December 15, 1984 to January 2, 1985. The count data for the 1983 CBC was published in American Birds, July-August 1984, and included 1246 count circles in the United States, 186 in Canada, and, added in that year, 19 in Central and South America, and 9 in the West Indies. This report includes capsule accounts of the CBCs conducted in Eastern Massachusetts in December 1984, and the accompanying map shows all the count circles in the state drawn according to their locations published in the July-August issue of American Birds.

A grand total of 190 species was recorded on the twenty-one eastern Massachusetts counts. Two additional races, the Ipswich Sparrow and the Oregon Junco, and one escape, the Red-crested Cardinal found at Arnold Arboretum in Boston, were also recorded. Another four species and one additional subspecies escaped the official tally for the Christmas Count Day but were noted during the count period (three days before and after). These were Green-backed Heron, Wild Turkey, Swainson's Thrush, Prairie Warbler, and a Bullock's Oriole.

Imagine 194 species in December in Massachusetts! No doubt, the very warm month had a great deal to do with the exceptional high counts reported. The temperature of 73° on December 29 broke all previous records. All water was open, and this contributed to higher counts in inland locations where, more often than not, ponds are sometimes frozen by mid-December. The wild food crop was also very good, and the birds that eat fruit or berries such as American Robins and Cedar Waxwings were on hand in record numbers.

The Cape Cod CBC, as usual, led all counts with 133 species recorded; the Greater Boston Count showed a surprising second-place finish with 129 species. The Millis CBC boasted the highest number of participants (326), but even this number of observers could not find as many Black-capped Chickadees as the Concord Count, whose annual total of that species exceeds all other totals on the continent.

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*Map on facing page:* Each Christmas Count Circle was located by the latitude and longitude (in degrees and minutes) of its center as given in the July-August 1984 issue of American Birds. Circles were drawn on a large, regional map which was reduced to the size shown here. Detailed topographic maps should be consulted to determine the precise boundaries of each circle.

Athol (1), Buzzards Bay (2), Cape Ann (3), Cape Cod (4), Central Berkshire (5), Concord (6), Greater Boston (7), Greenfield (8), Marshfield (9), Martha's Vineyard (10), Mid Cape Cod (11), Millis (12), Nantucket (13), New Bedford (14), Newburyport (15), Northampton (16), Northern Berkshire (17), Plymouth (18), Quincy (19), Springfield (20), Taunton-Middleboro (21), Tuckernuck Island (22), Uxbridge (23), Westminster (24), Worcester (25), and Newport County, R.I./Westport (26).

Athol: December 15, 1984; Robert Coyle, compiler.

47 species and 6528 individuals (both record highs).

Birds at feeders were decreased in number, but "non-feeder" birds were found in record numbers. There were new record high counts for seven species, and a Pied-billed Grebe at Quabbin was a first in the twenty-two year history of this CBC. Other highlights included a Northern Goshawk, 734 Dark-eyed Junco, 22 Common Redpoll, 95 Pine Siskin, and 883 Evening Grosbeak.

Buzzards Bay: December 15, 1984; Richard Harlow, compiler.

108 species and 1 additional race (Ipswich Sparrow).

Berry-eating birds were seen in record numbers: 1940 American Robin and 30 Hermit Thrush. Other high counts included 76 Northern Flicker, 50 Carolina Wren, 6 Winter Wren, 29 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 22 Gray Catbird, and 625 White-throated Sparrow. Special reports included 335 Horned Grebe, 3 Barrow's Goldeneye, 177 Hooded Merganser, 20 Common Snipe, 2 Forster's Tern, a Thick-billed Murre, and a Black-and-white Warbler.

Cape Ann: December 16, 1984; John Nove, compiler.

100 species and 36,276 individuals.

An Arctic Loon at Folly Cove, Rockport, was the highlight among many other notable counts such as 24 Red-necked Grebe, 496 Great Cormorant, 2 Redhead (a first for the count), 44 Razorbill, 4 Dovekie, 11 Black Guillemot, a Barred Owl, 2 Pileated Woodpecker, and a single Water Pipit.

Cape Cod: December 16, 1984; Blair Nikula, compiler.

133 species and 100,014 individuals.

Nineteen species tied or broke their previous high counts. Among the many highlights were 6552 Northern Gannet, 132 Great Blue Heron, a Great Egret, 18,842 Common Eider, 6 Harlequin Duck, 5 Merlin, a Clapper Rail, 21 Virginia Rail, a Common Moorhen, 12 Greater Yellowlegs, 45 Red Knot, 16,643 Black-legged Kittiwake, 2 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 17 Dovekie, and 676 Razorbill. Passerine highlights included 149 Northern Flicker, 11 Marsh Wren, 24 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 3 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (a first for the count), 20 Hermit Thrush, 1600 American Robin, 36 Gray Catbird, 2605 Yellow-rumped Warbler, an Orange-crowned Warbler, 20 Palm Warbler, 18 Common Yellowthroat, 4 Yellow-breasted Chat, a LeConte's Sparrow (another first), 4 Sharp-tailed, 9 Seaside, and 124 Swamp sparrow, and a Western Tanager.

Concord: December 30, 1984; Richard Walton, compiler.

78 species and 39,978 individuals (new high).

The previous high counts for 12 species were exceeded, and other highlights were 31 Hooded and 187 Common merganser. Raptors included a Cooper's Hawk, a Northern Goshawk, a Merlin (new for this count), a Peregrine Falcon, and 25 Eastern Screech-Owl. The tallies for Blue Jay (2313) and Black-capped Chickadee (2975) are contenders for the national high counts - usually true for Concord. Other high counts included 4 Pileated Woodpecker, 69 Brown Creeper, 850 Red-winged Blackbird, 5 Rusty Blackbird, and 245 Purple Finch. Special birds included a House Wren (a first), a Carolina Wren, a Dickcissel and 3 Common Redpoll.



Greater Boston: December 16, 1984; Robert Stymeist, compiler.  
129 species, 1 race (Oregon Junco), and 1 escape  
(Red-crested Cardinal).

Twenty-two species broke their previous high counts, and four new species were added to the overall total. Highlights were Osprey, 3 Laughing and 6 Common Black-headed gull, 7 species of Owl, a Common Raven (Cambridge), a Falco species (also Cambridge), a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and an Eastern Bluebird (both new to the count), 2 Nashville and one Orange-crowned warbler. Sparrow highlights included 4 Chipping, 81 Savannah, a Grasshopper, a Lincoln's (new to the count), and 12 White-crowned.

Marshfield: December 30, 1984; Warren Harrington, compiler.  
100 species and 1 additional race (Ipswich Sparrow).  
Highlights included 2118 Brant, 14,169 Common Eider, 3 King Eider, a Northern Goshawk, a Red-shouldered Hawk, 2 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (new to this count), a Black-and-white Warbler, 5 Fox Sparrow, and 1193 Red-winged Blackbird.

Martha's Vineyard: December 30, 1984; Susan Whiting, compiler.  
120 species, 1 additional race (Ipswich Sparrow).  
Among the many highlights were a Snowy Egret, 12 Tundra Swan, 15,204 White-winged Scoter, a Bald Eagle, 5 Laughing, 2 Little, and 4 Common Black-headed gull, 5 Common Barn-Owl, 8 Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, an Eastern Phoebe, a Western Kingbird, 2 Marsh Wren, 40 Palm Warbler, a Yellow-breasted Chat, and a Common Redpoll.

Mid-Cape Cod: December 22, 1984; Janet Aylward, compiler.  
104 species and 16,095 individuals.  
Eight new species were added to this three-year-old CBC including Northern Gannet, Double-crested Cormorant, Snowy Egret, Common Black-headed Gull, Pine Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Seaside and White-crowned sparrows. Other highlights included Laughing Gull, 10 Gray Catbird, and 4 Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

Millis: December 15, 1984; Brian Cassie, compiler.  
80 species and 26,200 individuals.  
The highlight of this count, according to the compiler, was the splendid participation of the feeder-watchers. The total number of participants will probably set an all-time record for North America - 326, 55 in the field and 271 at feeders! Seven new species were added to the all-time CBC list, and 36 new high counts were established. Highlights included a Northern Goshawk, a Red-shouldered Hawk, 12 Great Horned Owl, a Red-headed Woodpecker, 1338 Tufted Titmouse, a Western Tanager, and 3 Red Crossbill.

Nantucket: December 30, 1984, Edith Andrews, compiler.  
124 species.  
Highlights included 863 Common Loon, a Western Grebe, a Greater Shearwater (new to the count), 8622 Northern Gannet, 157 Redhead, 1 Eurasian Wigeon, 58,270 Common Eider, 1 King Eider, 8,122 Oldsquaw, 7 Barrow's Goldeneye, 15 Virginia Rail, 2 Little Gull, 3 Lesser Black-backed Gull, 24,303 Black-legged Kittiwake, a Forster's Tern, 58 Razorbill, 2 Common Murre, 1 Eastern Phoebe, 9 Marsh Wren, a Water Pipit, 1 Nashville, 1692 Yellow-rumped, and 18 Palm warbler, and the national high count of Jackdaws - 2!

New Bedford: December 16, 1984; Gil Fernandez, compiler.  
87 species and 16,813 individuals.

This CBC was about 5 percent below average for species with at least 10 percent fewer individuals - this despite an rise in participation of 30 percent. Highlights were an American Bittern, 152 Mute Swan, 2 Merlin, 17 Carolina Wren, 11 Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and 507 Cedar Waxwing.

Newburyport: December 22, 1985; Rick Heil, compiler.  
105 species and the second best count on record for the Newburyport area.

Highlights included a Western Grebe in Rowley (a first for the count), an American Bittern, 351 Green-winged Teal, 74 Northern Pintail, 5 Northern Shoveler, 2 adult Cooper's Hawk, an American Woodcock, 3 Marsh Wren, a Yellow-breasted Chat, 7 Seaside Sparrow, and 60 Purple Finch.

Plymouth: December 27, 1985; Trevor Lloyd-Evans, compiler.  
101 species, 1 race (Ipswich Sparrow), and 33,503 individuals.  
Highlights included a Eurasian Wigeon, 5 Redhead, 4 Barrow's Goldeneye, 86 Hooded Merganser, Red-headed Woodpecker, 5 Carolina Wren, a Marsh Wren, a Dickcissel, and 16 Ipswich Sparrow.

Quincy: December 15, 1984; Sibley Higginbotham, compiler.  
105 species.

Eight species had record high counts, and two new species were added - a White-rumped Sandpiper and a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, to put the all-time list for Quincy's 38 years of CBCs at 174. Other highlights included 11 Double-crested Cormorant, 2 Snow Goose, 340 Purple Sandpiper, a Little Gull, a Common Black-headed Gull, a Common Barn-Owl, a Chipping Sparrow, 9 Fox Sparrow, and a single White-winged Crossbill.

Tuckernuck Island: December 31, 1984; Marcia Litchfield, compiler.  
50 species and 1 race (Ipswich Sparrow).

For the first time in the six year history of this count an airplane was used to get to Tuckernuck and to census a large raft of eiders offshore. Muskeget Island, also included within the count circle, was not covered. Among the highlights were a Eurasian Wigeon, 251 Razorbill, 3 Short-eared Owl, and 9 Ipswich Sparrow. A Gyrfalcon observed at close range locking talons with 2 Short-eared Owls and a Northern Harrier was then leisurely watched as it sat on a small dead pine tree for seven minutes (glorious by observer standards). The eider rafts off Chappaquiddick and between Tuckernuck and Muskeget were awesome. Other sidelights of this CBC included 26 Gray Seal, 340 Harbor Seal, and 17 White-tailed Deer.

Uxbridge: December 29, 1984; Richard Hildreth, compiler.  
64 species and 13,120 individuals (both record highs).  
This is the second year for this CBC which includes part of Rhode Island within the count circle. Among the highlights were a Cooper's Hawk, an Iceland Gull, both Barred and Long-eared owl, a Red-headed Woodpecker, an Eastern Phoebe, and a Common Redpoll.

Westminster: December 23, 1985; John Williams, compiler.  
50 species and 4720 individuals.  
A Red-shouldered Hawk, 7 Ruffed Grouse, 15 Brown Creeper, a Western Tanager, a Vesper Sparrow, 5 White-winged Crossbill, 45 Pine Siskin, and

381 Evening Grosbeak were among the highlights from this Worcester County count.

Westport/Newport County, R.I.: December 16, 1984; Dave Emerson, compiler.  
128 species and 87,666 individuals.

Highlights included an American Bittern, an American Woodcock, a Forster's Tern, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, 2 Chipping Sparrow, 2 Fox Sparrow, a Northern Oriole. A total of 106 Carolina Wren were tallied, 21 in Westport and 85 in Newport, Rhode Island. Also of special note were 5 Semipalmated Plover found in Newport, R.I.

Worcester: December 15, 1984; Fran McMenemy, compiler.  
64 species and 15,397 individuals.

Highlights included a Mute Swan, a Brant, a Glaucous Gull, 2 Pileated Woodpecker, a Fish Crow, a Winter Wren, and a White-crowned Sparrow. During the count period, but not seen the day of the count were Wild Turkey, Swainson's Thrush, and a Northern (Bullock's) Oriole, all three of which were not seen on any other eastern Massachusetts CBC.

Taunton-Middleborough data were not available for this compilation. The complete 1984 results will be published in the July-August 1985 issue of American Birds. Copies can be obtained from American Birds, 950 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022. The 1985 CBC will be held December 18, 1985 through January 5, 1986.

ROBERT H. STYMEIST, an accountant by profession, has established a second career in birding. A staff member since its inception and former president of BIRD OBSERVER, he is currently the incoming president of the Brookline Bird Club (BBC), treasurer of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, and a member of the Bird Observer and "Rare Birds" Records committees. An accomplished North American birder, he has birded in Europe and the British Isles, in Tanzania, and in Central and South America. Bob has been fascinated by birds ever since the day, twenty-five years ago, that a venturesome catbird perched on the arm of his chair. Early May mornings he can be found, notebook in hand, censusing the migrants at Mount Auburn Cemetery. He teaches courses and leads birdwalks for the BBC, Habitat, and the Boston Center for Adult Education.

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# Field Records

## December

### 1984



by George W. Gove, Robert H. Stymeist, Lee E. Taylor

December 1984 was cloudy and very warm; the temperature averaged  $39.5^{\circ}$ ,  $5.8^{\circ}$  above normal, it was the seventh warmest December in 114 years. The high mark was  $73^{\circ}$  on December 29,  $32^{\circ}$  above normal for the date, and set weather records for future history books not only as the warmest December day on record but also as the warmest day ever in the entire winter season, December through February. The month's low was  $13^{\circ}$  on December 27. Precipitation in the form of rain totaled 2.93 inches, 1.55 inches less than normal. Snow totaled only 3.7 inches, 4.2 inches less than normal. The wet snow changing to rain early on the sixth caused slippery roads. Glazing was also noted on December 15-16 and on December 28.

#### LOONS THROUGH HERONS

An Arctic Loon was found on the Cape Ann CBC on December 16 at Folly Cove but could not be located on subsequent searches. The mild December weather surely accounted for the numbers of Pied-billed Grebes reported. A Western Grebe was noted in Rowley on December 22, and another continued to be seen in the Siasconset area of Nantucket.

A Greater Shearwater was carefully studied off Low Beach, Nantucket, during the CBC, not unprecedented for December with 19 having been noted in December 1981 and 10 reported well offshore in December 1979. The Nantucket bird is the latest winter date of record, the previous late date being December 16, 1979. A Manx Shearwater on December 1 at Low Beach was also one of very few winter records with the only other December record occurring in 1979. Northern Gannets were found in large numbers with 6552 noted on the Cape Cod CBC and 8622 tallied on the Nantucket CBC, where large numbers were found all month especially off the south side. Double-crested Cormorants were "around" just about everywhere, and the status of this species as an unusual winter straggler is being redefined [see J. Hatch, *American Birds*, 36(6): 984, 1985].

Lingering herons included Great Egrets on Nantucket and in Eastham, Snowy Egrets at Katama (M.V.), Westport, and Hyannis, a Little Blue Heron in Framingham, a Cattle Egret in North Attleboro, and a Green-backed Heron in Concord. Great Blue Herons were noted in good numbers on many CBC with 132 in the Cape Cod CBC. R.H.S.

SPECIES/DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER	OBSERVERS	DECEMBER 1984
Red-throated Loon:				
16,30	Cape Cod, Nantucket	55, 216	CBC	
30,31	M.V., Tuckernuck	73, 55	CBC	
Arctic Loon:				
16	Rockport (Folly Cove)	1	CBC (F.Hamlen)	
Common Loon:				
1	P.I., Gloucester	14, 15	G.d'Entremont#, E.Nielsen	
12,16	Nantucket (2 locations)	156, 60	E.Andrews, M.Litchfield	
30	M.V., Nantucket	531, 863	CBC	
Pied-billed Grebe:				
1	Nantucket, Cambridge	4, 3	E.Andrews, L.Taylor	
16,30	Cape Cod, Nantucket	25, 17	CBC	
Horned Grebe:				
15	Quincy, Buzzards Bay	27, 335	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	6, 55	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	28, 5	CBC	
Red-necked Grebe:				
9,12-14	Plymouth Beach, Manomet Bluff	3, 15+	D.Evered, D.Evered	

<u>SPECIES/DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>OBSERVERS</u>	<u>DECEMBER 1984</u>
Red-Necked Grebe (cont.):				
15,30	Cape Ann, M.V.	24, 15	CBC	
Western Grebe:				
17-30	Nantucket (from Nov.)	1	K.Able + v.o.	
22	Rowley	1	CBC (R.Alexander)	
Greater Shearwater:				
30	Nantucket (Low Beach)	1	CBC (W.Boyle, P.W.Smith)	
Manx Shearwater:				
1	Nantucket (Low Beach)	1	M.Litchfield	
Northern Gannet:				
3,30	Nantucket	2000 (Low Beach),	8622	M.Litchfield, CBC
16,23	Cape Cod, S.Monomoy	6552, 1000+		CBC, W.Petersen
Great Cormorant:				
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	496, 96, 129		CBC
Double-crested Cormorant:				
2,8	Braintree, P.I.	1, 2		R.Abrams#, E.Nielsen
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	3, 2, 9		CBC
27,30	Plymouth, Nantucket	2, 1		CBC
American Bittern:				
9,22	P.I.	1, 1		E.Nielsen, CBC
Great Blue Heron:				
15	Buzz.Bay,Millis,Quincy	53, 3, 12		CBC
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	7, 132, 11		CBC
30	Marshfield, M.V.	26, 80		CBC
Great Egret:				
thr.,2-16	Nantucket, Eastham	1, 1		M.Litchfield# + v.o., C.Ewer + v.o.
Snowy Egret:				
8,30	Katama	1, 1		V.Laux, CBC
12+26,22	Westport, Hyannis	1, 1		R.Laubach, B.Nikula#
Little Blue Heron:				
1-15	Framingham	1 imm.		K.Hamilton
Cattle Egret:				
2	N.Attleboro	1		B.Sorrie
Green-backed Heron:				
15-31	Concord	1		S.Clark#
Black-crowned Night-Heron:				
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	29, 16		CBC
30	Nantucket, M.V.	6, 6		CBC

#### WATERFOWL

With the warm December weather, counts of puddle ducks were higher than usual on the CBCs; especially note the Newburyport CBC (where more often than not Plum Island is under ice and snow) that this year tallied 351 Green-winged Teal, 74 Northern Pintail, 5 Northern Shoveler and 43 Gadwall. Blue-winged Teal, normally very unusual in December, were noted from two locations, and Eurasian Wigeons were found in Plymouth and on Nantucket. The combined Brant total on the CBCs from Boston to Cape Cod was 7597. Tundra Swans were noted from Plymouth and from the usual hard-to-get-to spot on Martha's Vineyard.

The bay ducks moved farther south with fewer Canvasbacks, Redheads, and Ring-necked Ducks being reported. The total of Redheads remained high on Nantucket where 157 were logged in on the CBC.

The population of Common Eider off our coast is mind-boggling. The total number recorded on the eastern Massachusetts CBC amounted to approximately 301,921 individuals, 202,000 of which were reported from the Tuckernuck CBC. The latter estimate was made by two separate airflights over the rafting eiders between Skiff Island off Chappaquiddick, Tuckernuck, and Muskeget islands. With the help of the pilot, Kevin Shore, we were able to fly over the eider at various levels. They were packed in solid, and one group stretched for over a mile. It was AWESOME!

The count of Oldsquaw at Nantucket was down, and speculation as to where the majority are now rafting was raised, especially since more and more White-winged Scoters and especially, Red-breasted Mergansers are rafting in nearby waters. Of the more unusual ducks, as many as eight King Eider were reported, and fifteen Harlequin Ducks were seen, all from traditional locations. Hooded Mergansers were in good supply with high counts on many CBCs whereas Common Merganser counts were down due to the warm weather and open water; many were still noted in northern New England. R.H.S.

<u>SPECIES/DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>OBSERVERS</u>	<u>DECEMBER 1984</u>
Tundra Swan: 7,13-30	Plymouth, M.V.	1 imm., 12	D.Brown, V.Laux + v.o.	
Mute Swan: thr.	Arlington	2	L.Taylor + v.o.	
15,27	Buzz.Bay, Plymouth	54, 104	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	344, 75	CBC	
Snow Goose: thr.	P.I.	max. 26 (12/22)	v.o.	
7,15	Plymouth Beach, Quincy	42, 2	D.Evered, CBC	
Brant: 15	Buzz.Bay, Quincy	186, 1203	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	2612, 441	CBC	
27,30	Plymouth, Marshfield	1037, 2118	CBC	
Canada Goose: 15	Buzz.Bay, Millis	983, 1121	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston, Cape Ann	1377, 1023, 2222	CBC	
22	Newburyport, Monomoy	2313, 600	CBC, W.Petersen#	
30	M.V., Nantucket, Concord	2851, 869, 6349	CBC	
Wood Duck: 16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	1, 2	CBC	
26,30	Stoughton, M.V.	1, 4	R.Titus, CBC	
Green-winged Teal: 22,30	Newburyport, Nantucket	351, 54	CBC	
American Black Duck: 16	Cape Ann, Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	552, 3483, 1195	CBC	
22,27	Newburyport, Plymouth	2005, 1359	CBC	
Mallard: 15,16	Buzz.Bay, Gr. Boston	382, 1616	CBC	
Northern Pintail: 22	Newburyport	74	CBC	
Blue-winged Teal: 2,30	Mashpee, Madaket	1, 1	P.Trimble, CBC (F.Purnell)	
Northern Shoveler: 9,22	S.Monomoy, Newburyport	20, 5	B.Nikula#, CBC	
24,27	Watertown, Plymouth	1, 1	M.Hall, CBC	
Gadwall: 16,22	Cape Ann, Newburyport	16, 43	CBC	
Eurasian Wigeon: thr.	Plymouth, Nantucket	1 m., 2 m.	v.o., v.o.	
American Wigeon: thr.	Belmont, Cambridge	max. 50, max. 28	v.o., v.o.	
30,31	Nantucket, Tuckernuck	91, 145	CBC	
Canvasback: thr.	Cambridge (F.Pond)	max. 80	J.Barton	
2,15	Mashpee, Buzz.Bay	150, 234	P.Trimble, CBC	
Redhead: 2,15	Braintree, Buzz.Bay	1 f., 1	W.Petersen, CBC	
16-25,16	Brookline, Cape Ann	1 f., 2	M.Greenwald#, CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	4, 157	CBC	
Ring-necked Duck: 15	Buzz.Bay, Quincy	24, 22	CBC	
16	Cape Ann, Cape Cod	10, 66	CBC	
Greater Scaup: 15,16	Buzz.Bay, Gr. Boston	2609, 3464	CBC	
Lesser Scaup: 2,15	Mashpee, Millis	10, 8	P.Trimble, CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	11, 9	CBC	
27,30	Plymouth, Nantucket	4, 7	CBC	
Common Eider: 15,16	Quincy, Gr. Boston	1145, 3197	CBC	
16	Cape Ann, Cape Cod	636, 18842	CBC	
22,27	Newburyport, Plymouth	36, 8430	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	6745, 58270	CBC	
31	Tuckernuck	202,000	CBC	
King Eider: thr.,8	Manomet, Eastham	3-4, 1 f.	D.Evered + v.o., C.Ewer	
23-31	Nantucket	2-3 ad.	M.Litchfield + v.o.	
Harlequin Duck: 2,16	N.Scituate, Cape Cod	1 f., 6	SSBC, CBC	
17-30	Nantucket	pr.	E.Andrews + v.o.	
29,30	Rockport, M.V.	1 imm. m., 5	G.d'Entremont, CBC	
Oldsquaw: 2	Braintree (Great Pond)	1	SSBC (W.Petersen)	



SPECIES/DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER	OBSERVERS	DECEMBER 1984
Oldsquaw (cont.):				
30,31	Nantucket, Tuckernuck	8122, 5125	CBC	
Black Scoter:				
16	Cape Ann, Cape Cod	82, 230	CBC	
30	Nantucket, M.V.	100, 929	CBC	
Surf Scoter:				
15,27	Buzz.Bay, Plymouth	267, 58	CBC	
29	Nantucket Sound	300+	G.Gove, R.Stymeist	
White-winged Scoter:				
15	Buzz.Bay, Quincy	954, 528	CBC	
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	824, 658, 394	CBC	CBC
30,31	M.V., Tuckernuck	15204, 2170	CBC	
Common Goldeneye:				
15	Athol,Buzz.Bay,Quincy	270, 1025, 770	CBC	
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	522, 655, 1251	CBC	CBC
30	M.V., Nantucket	2314, 2582	CBC	
Barrow's Goldeneye:				
2-7,14	N.Scituate, Manomet	1 m., 1 f.	W.Petersen#, D.Evered	
15	Buzz Bay, Quincy	3, 2	CBC	
16	Gr. Boston, Cape Cod	2, 1	CBC	
27,30	Plymouth, Nantucket	4, 7	CBC	
Bufflehead:				
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Gr. Boston	2974, 1410	CBC	
16,30	Cape Cod, Nantucket	1502, 611	CBC	
Hooded Merganser:				
9,11	S.Monomoy, Cambridge	30, 7	B.Nikula#, v.o.	
15	Buzz.Bay, Quincy	177, 59	CBC	
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	4, 44, 48	CBC	
22,27	Newburyport, Plymouth	14, 86	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	40, 22	CBC	
Common Merganser:				
1-31,2	Framingham, Braintree	max. 85, 100+	v.o., SSBC	
15	Athol, Quincy, Millis	182, 125, 6	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	10, 168	CBC	
27,30	Plymouth, Concord	424, 187	CBC	
Red-breasted Merganser:				
15	Buzz.Bay, Quincy	2408, 1762	CBC	
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	394, 1100, 1772	CBC	CBC
22,27	Newburyport, Plymouth	96, 268	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	16855, 4889	CBC	
Ruddy Duck:				
1-18,2	Framingham, Braintree	max. 15 (12/7), 2	K.Hamilton, SSBC	
9	S.Monomoy, Lakeville	230, 22	B.Nikula#, D.Briggs	
15	Buzz.Bay, Millis, Quincy	4, 8, 31	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	36, 61	CBC	
30	M.V., Concord	1, 34	CBC	

#### RAPTORS THROUGH NORTHERN BOBWHITE

An Osprey was found in Dorchester on the Boston CBC, and it remained in the Neponset-Milton area through December 24. Four Bald Eagles were recorded, with two seen along the Merrimac River in Amesbury. On the Millis CBC, a Red-shouldered Hawk was found; Northern Goshawks made appearances in five locations, while Cooper's Hawks were noted in three areas, with two together (!) in Ipswich.

Falcons caused much excitement - they always do - but more so this month with Gyrfalcons, Peregrines, Lanners, Prairies and Sakers all mentioned. Peregrines totaled thirteen individuals from eleven locations all coastal with the exception of Cambridge. Gyrfalcons were reported from Monomoy and Tuckernuck, the latter bird watched at close range locking talons with Short-eared Owls and Northern Harrier. Another Gyrfalcon was well-described at Fresh Pond in Cambridge on December 9. The observer noted a falcon with "a lack of facial markings, long and heavy tail, light gray above and below, back mottled brown and flew with deep wing beats". Subsequently, other observers at Fresh Pond reported a large falcon flying toward Watertown. Then - a falcon was found roosting each night at 700 Huron Avenue across from Fresh Pond. Through telescopes, this bird was seen to be wearing a bell and "jesses," straps that falconers use to hold their birds. Other observers had earlier noted a falcon with jesses, possibly a Peregrine and probably the same bird, in other areas of Cambridge and Belmont. The many descriptions that streamed in varied greatly from one to another, but this observer cannot be persuaded that there was a platoon of falcons floating around Cambridge.

R.H.S.

<u>SPECIES/DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>OBSERVERS</u>	<u>DECEMBER 1984</u>
Osprey: 16-24	Dorchester-Milton	1	D.Brown# + v.o.	
Bald Eagle:				
1	Amesbury	1 ad., 1 imm.	v.o.	
5,30	Wayland, M.V.	1 imm., 1 imm.	H.Parker, CBC	
Northern Harrier:				
thr.	P.I.	max. 6 (12/1)	v.o.	
16,22	Cape Cod, Newburyport	13, 14	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	25, 37	CBC	
Sharp-shinned Hawk:				
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Cape Cod	5, 9	CBC	
30	M.V., Concord	8, 6	CBC	
Cooper's Hawk:				
22	Ipswich	2 ad.	CBC (J.Berry)	
30	M.V., Concord	1, 1	CBC	
Northern Goshawk:				
1,15	E.Middleboro, Millis	1 imm., 1	K.Anderson, CBC	
22	Newburyport	2	CBC	
30	Marshfield, Concord	1, 2	CBC	
Red-shouldered Hawk:				
15	Millis	1	CBC	
Red-tailed Hawk:				
15	Millis, Quincy	11, 8	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	13, 37	CBC	
22,29	Newburyport, Uxbridge	30, 14	CBC	
30	M.V.,Nantucket,Concord	44, 21, 60	CBC	
Rough-legged Hawk:				
16,22	Gr. Boston, Newburyport	3, 5	CBC	
30,31	Marshfield, Tuckernuck	1, 2	CBC	
American Kestrel:				
16	Cape Ann,Cape Cod,Gr. Boston	13, 19, 20	CBC	
30	M.V.,Nantucket,Concord	11, 19, 11	CBC	
Peregrine Falcon:				
2,9	N.Monomoy	1 ad.	B.Nikula#	
5-11	Marion	1	fide R.Harlow	
17,31	M.V., Tuckernuck	1, 1	P.Huntington, CBC	
	Other reports of 7 to 9 individuals from 7 locations			
<u>Cyrfalcon:</u>				
9	Cambridge	1 (details)	K.Hartel	
9;16,31	S.Monomoy; N. Monomoy	1 gray(details)	B.Nikula#;W.Bailey#,R.Clem	
31	Tuckernuck	1 (details)	S.Perkins, R.Stymeist + v.o.	
Ring-necked Pheasant:				
16	Gr. Boston, Cape Cod	162, 1	CBC	
Ruffed Grouse:				
15	Athol, Millis	6, 26	CBC	
22,23	Newburyport, Westminster	9, 7	CBC	
Northern Bobwhite:				
16,22	Cape Cod, E.Middleboro	107, 20	CBC, K.Anderson	

#### RAILS THROUGH SHOREBIRDS

This is the month of the annual Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs) held under the auspices of the National Audubon Society, and many observers are in the field ferreting out every last bird to get the local count numbers and rarities to new record highs and, certainly, higher and better than someone else's count. This is reflected both in the total numbers reported for each species and in the number of species reported.

A possible Yellow Rail was reported in a cattail marsh on Nantucket the day after the Christmas count there. Details on the sighting were submitted. Only a fleeting glimpse of the bird was had in the early morning light, and the report was not entirely convincing. American Coot were present here in low numbers as was noted in the November records and as can be seen in these records.

Black-bellied Plover reports include the highest December totals in BOEM records, and there are only three other December reports of Semipalmated Plover. Lesser Yellow-legs is another bird that is not usual in December, and Willet has been reported only twice in the last twelve Decembers. On the other side of the coin, this is the first December in the last eight years that dowitcher, of one form or another, has not been reported. G.W.G.

SPECIES/DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER	OBSERVERS	DECEMBER 1984
Clapper Rail:				
16	Cape Cod	1	CBC	
Virginia Rail:				
16,30	Cape Cod, Nantucket	21, 15	CBC	
30	Marshfield	4	CBC	
Common Moorhen:				
1,8,16	Chatham	1	B.Nikula#	
American Coot:				
thr.	Cambridge	max. 11 (12/2)	D.Arvidson	
2,9	Braintree, Lakeville	30, 20	SSBC, D.Briggs	
16,30	Gr. Boston, Nantucket	18, 71	CBC	
Black-bellied Plover:				
1,8	Nantucket, Newburyport	27, 5	P.Gardner, BBC	
15,16	Quincy, Cape Cod	15, 26	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	66, 39	CBC	
Semipalmated Plover:				
2,9	Duxbury, M.V.	1, 1	SSBC, W.Manter#	
Killdeer:				
3,6	E.Middleboro, Nantucket	3, 1	K.Anderson, M.Litchfield	
16,29	Gr. Boston, S.Dartmouth	3, 7	CBC, T.Raymond	
30	M.V., Nantucket	12, 10	CBC	
Greater Yellowlegs:				
8,16	Eastham, Cape Cod	6, 12	C.Ewer, CBC	
Lesser Yellowlegs:				
1	Norton	1	J.Kricher	
Willet:				
14	Nantucket	1	R.Veit	
Ruddy Turnstone:				
15	Quincy, Buzz.Bay	1, 1	CBC	
16,30	Gr. Boston, Nantucket	1, 55	CBC	
Red Knot:				
16,30	Cape Cod, M.V.	45, 8	CBC	
Sanderling:				
16,27	Cape Cod, Plymouth	380, 25	CBC	
30,31	Nantucket, Tuckernuck	324, 99	CBC	
Purple Sandpiper:				
1,16	Rockport, Boston	110, 75	E.Nielsen, CBC	
15,30	Quincy, Nantucket	340, 55	CBC	
Dunlin:				
2,9	Westport, Winthrop	600, 70	G.Gove, J.Cumming	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	1070, 219	CBC	
29,30	S.Dartmouth, Marshfield	200, 260	T.Raymond, CBC	
Common Snipe:				
8,15	Newburyport, Buzz.Bay	2, 20	E.Nielsen, CBC	
22,27	Newburyport, Plymouth	15, 6	CBC	
30	M.V.	3	CBC	
American Woodcock:				
1,16	E.Middleboro, Cape Cod	1, 3	K.Anderson, CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	3, 2	CBC	

#### GULLS THROUGH ALCIDS

Laughing Gulls were still present at month's end on the Vineyard, and Little Gulls were found on the Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard CBCs. A total of six Common Black-headed Gulls were found in the Greater Boston area, and four were noted on the Vineyard. The counts of Bonaparte's Gulls numbered in the hundreds.

A Mew Gull (Common Gull of the Old World) was reported from Nantucket on December 14, and a Thayer's Gull was reported from there on December 17, both birds being noted as in first winter plumage. No details were submitted although the observers are experienced and reliable and are familiar with these birds. Both of these birds are rare enough and difficult enough to identify that extreme care and attention to details is warranted in their identification. A book compiled by R.R. Veit and R.A. Forster and soon to be published by Massachusetts Audubon lists all the known Massachusetts records of these birds. For the Mew Gull, there are a total of 23 records through 1981; 18 of these are spring (January 1 to May 9) records, and two specimens collected proved to be of the European race, Larus canus canus. Of five fall (August 6 to October 10) records, two reports were considered to be of the western U.S. race, Larus canus brachyrhynchus. These races are said to be separable in the first basic plumage, assuming first, of course, that you can separate them from Ring-billed Gull. See the description of Mew Gull seen November 30, 1983, that appeared in the February 1984 BOEM, 12(1): 18 and the letter from Eirik A. T. Blom in this issue about the March 1984 sighting of this species.

The Thayer's Gull is more problematical due to confusion with Iceland Gull plumage. The fact that Thayer's Gull has occurred in the state is attested to by a specimen taken in 1982. There are several reliable reports of this species, all in first basic plumage, spanning the period from December to April. The exact status of this species in the state remains to be determined.

Numbers of Iceland Gulls seen on CBCs seem low with the exception of those counted at Nantucket. A total of eight Lesser Black-backed Gulls was reported for the month. Black-legged Kittiwakes were seen in abundance close to shore, probably feeding on the abundance of sand lance (*Ammodytes* sp.).

A Ross' Gull was noted in Newburyport Harbor on December 3, first at the old Coast Guard station and then at the boat ramp at the seawall. Identifying features were long wings, long wedge-shaped tail well seen, short bill, rounded head, and dark smudge near the eye. The bird had no neck ring and was washed with pink on the underparts. For further details see the report by Stu Tingley elsewhere in this issue.

A late tern was noted in Woods Hole on December 31, and Forster's Terns were seen on the Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket CBCs. All of the expected (but not always seen) alcids were reported as were two not expected: two Common Murres at Nantucket and two Atlantic Puffin at Rockport.

G.W.G.

SPECIES/DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER	OBSERVERS	DECEMBER 1984
Laughing Gull:				
16	Gr. Boston, Nantucket	3, 1 ad.	CBC, M.Litchfield	
30	M.V.	5	CBC	
Little Gull:				
15,15-17	Quincy, Nantucket	1, 1 (1 W)	CBC, M.Litchfield#	
12-14,30	M.V.	1, 2	V.Laux, CBC	
30	Nantucket	2	CBC	
Common Black-headed Gull:				
12-14,19	M.V., E.Boston	1 ad., 2	V.Laux, J.Cumming	
16,30	Gr. Boston, M.V.	6, 4 (2 ad. + 2 imm.)	CBC	
Bonaparte's Gull:				
2	Westport, S.Dartmouth	200, 150	G.Gove#	
15,16	Quincy, Cape Cod	1861, 357	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	1131, 1092	CBC	
Mew (Common) Gull:				
14	Nantucket	1 (1 W)	R.Veit	
Ring-billed Gull:				
3,9	Halifax, Framingham	200, 65	K.Anderson, K.Hamilton	
16,27	Gr. Boston, Plymouth	2474, 703	CBC	
30	M.V.	1419	CBC	
Herring Gull:				
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	13500, 9773	CBC	
16,30	Cape Ann, Nantucket	12601, 53000	CBC	
Thayer's Gull:				
17	Nantucket	1 (1 W)	K.Able (fide B.Nikula)	
Iceland Gull:				
16	Cape Cod, Cape Ann	3, 11	CBC	
22	Newburyport	6	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	2, 38	CBC	
Lesser Black-backed Gull:				
8,16	Gloucester, Cape Cod	1 (ad.), 2	G.Gove, CBC	
14,30	Nantucket	2(1 W, 3 W), 3	R.Veit, CBC	
Glaucous Gull:				
16,30	Cape Ann, Nantucket	7, 6	CBC	
	Four from four locations.			
Great Black-backed Gull:				
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	3520, 821	CBC	
16,30	Cape Ann, Nantucket	4178, 3991	CBC	
Black-legged Kittiwake:				
16	Cape Cod	16,643	CBC	
23	Monomoy	8-10,000	W.Petersen#	
30	Nantucket	24,303	CBC	
Ross' Gull (Details submitted):				
3	Newburyport	1 ad.	S.Tingley#	
tern sp.:				
31	Woods Hole	1	A.Poole	
Forster's Tern:				
30	M.V., Nantucket	2, 1	CBC (S.Whiting), CBC (P.Buckley)	
large alcid sp.:				
1	Rockport	4	E.Nielsen	

SPECIES/DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER	OBSERVERS	DECEMBER 1984
large alcid sp. (cont.):				
4,7	Eastham	45, 200	B.Nikula	
16	Cape Cod	89	CBC	
Dovekie:				
1,16	Rockport, Cape Cod	3, 17	E.Nielsen, CBC	
17,18	Nantucket	1	E.Andrews	
Common Murre:				
30	Nantucket	2	CBC (E.Andrews)	
Thick-billed Murre:				
15;16	Buzz.Bay;Cape Cod,Cape Ann	1; 1, 1	CBC	
Razorbill:				
1,4,7,13	Manomet	1-2 each day	D.Evered	
16	Cape Ann, Cape Cod	44, 676	CBC	
30,31	Nantucket, Tuckernuck	58, 251	CBC	
Black Guillemot:				
6,16	Manomet, Cape Ann	3, 7	D.Evered#, CBC	
16,30	Cape Cod, Nantucket	2, 3	CBC	
Atlantic Puffin:				
1	Rockport	2	E.Nielsen	

#### MOURNING DOVE THROUGH WOODPECKERS

Common Barn-Owls were seen on the Quincy and Martha's Vineyard CBCs and one was found dead on the Greater Boston CBC. All of the owls on the Massachusetts checklist were found on the CBCs as were all of the woodpeckers. Belted Kingfishers were noted in high numbers on the Buzzards Bay, (Outer) Cape Cod, and Martha's Vineyard CBCs. The ratio of Downy to Hairy Woodpecker on Cape Cod was 6 to 1 and in Concord was 3.25 to 1. G.W.G.

Mourning Dove:				
thr.	Brookline (at feeder)	max. 51 (12/25)	H.Wiggin	
15,16	Millis, Cape Ann	1511, 374	CBC	
22,30	Newburyport, Concord	986, 1636	CBC	
Common Barn-Owl:				
15,16	Quincy, Gr. Boston	1, 1 (dead)	CBC	
30	M.V.	5	CBC	
Eastern Screech-Owl:				
15	Millis, Quincy	18, 10	CBC	
16	Gr. Boston, Cape Ann	27, 5	CBC	
30	Concord, M.V.	25, 7	CBC	
Great Horned Owl:				
15	Millis, Quincy	12, 4	CBC	
16	Gr. Boston, Cape Cod	8, 10	CBC	
22,30	Newburyport, Concord	4, 10	CBC	
Snowy Owl:				
2,7	P.I., Gr. Boston	2, 3	BBC, N.Smith	
22	Newburyport	2	CBC	
Barred Owl:				
15	Millis, Quincy	1, 1	CBC	
16	Cape Ann	1	CBC	
Long-eared Owl:				
2,9	Hamilton, P.I.	1, 1	v.o., R.Heil	
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Gr. Boston	1, 1	CBC	
30	Nantucket, Concord	1, 1	CBC	
Short-eared Owl:				
16;30	Gr. Boston; M.V., Nantucket	1; 1, 6	CBC	
31	Tuckernuck	3	CBC	
Northern Saw-whet Owl:				
1,16	Hamilton, Gr. Boston	2, 1	G.d'Entremont#, CBC	
26-30,30	Nantucket, M.V.	1, 1	E.Andrews, CBC	
29	P.I.	1	L.Taylor#	
Belted Kingfisher:				
15	Quincy, Buzz.Bay	13, 29	CBC	
16	Gr. Boston, Cape Cod	11, 35	CBC	
27,30	Plymouth, M.V.	11, 31	CBC	
Red-headed Woodpecker:				
7,15	Plymouth, Millis	1, 1	D.Brown, CBC	
Red-bellied Woodpecker:				
30	Concord, M.V.	1, 8	CBC	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:				
16,30	Gr. Boston, M.V.	1, 2	CBC	
Downy Woodpecker:				
16	Gr. Boston, Cape Cod	166, 66	CBC	

SPECIES/DATE	LOCATION	NUMBER	OBSERVERS	DECEMBER 1984
Downy Woodpecker (cont.):				
22,30	Newburyport, Concord	108, 393	CBC	
Hairy Woodpecker:				
16,30	Cape Cod, Concord	11, 122	CBC	
Northern Flicker:				
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Cape Cod	76, 149	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	173, 162	CBC	
Pileated Woodpecker:				
2,16	Hamilton, Cape Ann	1, 2	J.Berry, CBC	
20,30	Bedford, Concord	1, 4	J.Henley, CBC	

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH WARBLERS

Flycatchers reports originated only from Cape Cod and the islands. The count of two Eastern Phoebe's equalled last year's December total, but the species was unreported for the month in the preceeding six years. A Common Raven at Fresh Pond in Cambridge was seen and heard by a number of observers for several days at midmonth. Raven reports from the eastern part of the commonwealth have been increasing of late, but are still of high interest. The Buzzards Bay CBC recorded more than double the number of Carolina Wrens than has been the average for the last nine years. Ten Blue-gray Gnatcatchers far exceeded the only other recent December record of a single individual. The generally mild weather allowed many semi-hardy species to hang on in numbers well into December. In addition to the Carolina Wrens and gnatcatchers, there were remarkable numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Hermit Thrushes, mimids, and unusual warbler species for winter including Black-and-white warblers, and American Redstart. Slightly hardier but still uncommon warbler species for December were represented by reports of several Nashville and Prairie individuals. L.E.T.

Eastern Phoebe:				
30	Nantucket, M.V.	1, 1	CBC	
Western Kingbird:				
from Nov.-14	WBWS	max. 2	v.o.	
30	M.V.	1	CBC	
Horned Lark:				
9,30	Ipswich, Concord	150, 190	R.Heil#, CBC	
Blue Jay:				
15,30	Millis, Concord	2101, 2313	CBC	
American Crow:				
8,30	Ipswich, Concord	100, 2096	G.Gove#, CBC	
Fish Crow:				
1,2	Eastham, Lexington	1, 1	C.Goodrich, L.Taylor	
15,30	Millis, Concord	15, 20	CBC	
Common Raven:				
13-16	Cambridge	1	J.Barton#	
Jackdaw:				
thr.	Nantucket	2	v.o.	
Black-capped Chickadee:				
15,30	Millis, Concord	2724, 2975	CBC	
Tufted Titmouse:				
15,30	Millis, Concord	1338, 794	CBC	
Red-breasted Nuthatch:				
8,16	Newburyport, Cape Ann	2, 7	G.d'Entremont, CBC	
22, 30	Newburyport, Concord	15, 10	CBC	
White-breasted Nuthatch:				
15,30	Millis, Concord	346, 381	CBC	
Brown Creeper:				
15,30	Millis, Concord	46, 69	CBC	
Carolina Wren:				
2-18,15	Westport, Buzz.Bay	2, 50	v.o., CBC	
16	Westport, New Bedford	21, 17	CBC	
30	M.V., Concord	19, 1	CBC	
House Wren:				
2,15	Lexington, Buzz.Bay	1, 1	L.Taylor, CBC	
16,30	Cape Cod, Concord	1, 1	CBC	
Winter Wren:				
2,4	Westport, Middleboro	1, 1	G.Gove#, K.Anderson	
15,16-30	Buzz Bay, 5 CBCs	6, 8 total	CBC	
16,30	Cape Cod, M.V.	5, 3	CBC	
Marsh Wren:				
9,22	P.I., Monomoy	2, 1	R.Heil, W.Petersen#	
16-30,30	4 CBCs, Nantucket	8 total, 9	CBC	
Golden-crowned Kinglet:				
15,16	Millis, Cape Cod	85, 88	CBC	



<u>SPECIES/DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>OBSERVERS</u>	<u>DECEMBER 1984</u>
Ruby-crowned Kinglet:				
15,15-31	Buzz.Bay, 12 CBCs	29, 43 total	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, New Bedford	24, 11	CBC	
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:				
1,15-16	Rockport, 4 CBCs	1, 4 singles	B.Weissman, CBC	
16,30	Cape Cod, Marshfield	3, 2	CBC	
Eastern Bluebird:				
2	N.Attleboro, E.Taunton	4, 9	B.Sorrie, R.Turner	
16,28	Boston, E.Harwich	1, 4	D.Brown#, R.Fish	
Hermit Thrush:				
4,12	Cambridge, Dartmouth	1, 1	L.Robinson, C.Laubach	
15,15-30	Buzz.Bay, 6 CBCs	30, 27 total	CBC	
16	Cape Cod, Cape Ann	20, 5	CBC	
American Robin:				
2,8	Middleboro, Ipswich	50+, 12	D.Briggs#, G.Gove#	
15,30	Buzz.Bay, M.V.	1940, 557	CBC	
Gray Catbird:				
2,3	Westport, Nantucket	2, 2	G.Gove#, E.Andrews	
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Cape Cod	22, 36	CBC	
16,22	Westport, Mid-Cape	17, 10	CBC	
27-30,30	3 CBCs, M.V.	13 total, 22	CBC	
Northern Mockingbird:				
16,30	Gr. Boston, Concord	154, 242	CBC	
Brown Thrasher:				
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Cape Cod	3, 2	CBC	
22,27	Mid-Cape, Plymouth	2, 1	CBC	
Water Pipit:				
16,30	Cape Ann, Nantucket	1, 1	CBC	
Cedar Waxwing:				
1,11	IRWS, Concord	30, 50	J.Berry, S.Henderson	
15	Buzz.Bay	1090	CBC	
Northern Shrike:				
16,18	Gr. Boston, P.I.	1, 1	CBC, v.o.	
30,31	Nantucket, M.V.	1, 1	CBC, W.Petersen#	
Orange-crowned Warbler:				
1,16	Falmouth, Hull	1, 1	C.Ewer, R.Abrams	
16	Cape Cod, Gr. Boston	1, 1	CBC	
Nashville Warbler:				
16	Gr. Boston, Cohasset	2, 1	CBC, R.Abrams	
Yellow-rumped Warbler:				
16,30	Cape Cod, Nantucket	2605, 1692	CBC	
Pine Warbler:				
9,16	Lakeville, Cape Cod	1, 3	D.Briggs, CBC	
22,27	Mid-Cape, Plymouth	1, 1	CBC	
30	Marshfield, Nantucket	1, 6	CBC	
Prairie Warbler:				
27-31, 30	Nantucket, M.V.	1, 1	E.Andrews#, CBC	
Palm Warbler:				
4,15-31	Cambridge, 7 CBCs	4, 17 total	L.Robinson, CBC	
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Cape Cod	14, 20	CBC	
30	M.V., Nantucket	40, 18	CBC	
Black-and-white Warbler:				
15,30	Buzz.Bay, Marshfield	1, 1	CBC	
American Redstart:				
10	Brewster	1	C.Goodrich	
Common Yellowthroat:				
15,16	Buzz.Bay, Cape Cod	6, 18	CBC	
16-30,30	5 CBCs, Concord	9 total, 2	CBC	
Yellow-breasted Chat:				
1,2	Falmouth, Westport	1, 1	C.Ewer, J.Gordon#	
9,16	Chatham, Cape Cod	1, 4	T.Vose, CBC	
22,30	Newburyport, M.V.	1, 1	CBC	

#### TANAGER THROUGH EVENING GROSBEAK

Two reports of Western Tanager were received, one individual in Millis for two weeks and another on the Cape Cod CBC. That same CBC effort turned up a LeConte's Sparrow, always rare in our region but even more so in December. Other unusual reports included, from the Greater Boston CBC a single Grasshopper Sparrow in Winthrop and a single Lincoln's Sparrow in Lexington. Continuing the trend from the fall, winter finches were very sparsely reported, mostly from interior locales.

L.E.T.

<u>SPECIES/DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>OBSERVERS</u>	<u>DECEMBER 1984</u>
<u>Western Tanager:</u>				
10-24,16	Millis, Cape Cod	1 (details), 1	v.o., CBC	
<u>Northern Cardinal:</u>				
15,30	Millis, Concord	450, 290	CBC	
<u>Dickcissel:</u>				
3,27	Rockport, Plymouth	1 imm. m., 1	R.Norris, CBC	
30	Concord	1	CBC	
<u>Rufous-sided Towhee:</u>				
2,3	Westport, Reading	2, 1 m.	G.Gove#, M.Martinek	
15,16-30	Buzz Bay, 4 CBCs	38, 26 total	CBC	
27,30	Plymouth, M.V.	14, 17	CBC	
<u>American Tree Sparrow:</u>				
15,22	Millis, Newburyport	713, 836	CBC	
30	Concord	889	CBC	
<u>Chipping Sparrow:</u>				
15	Millis, Quincy	1, 1	CBC	
16,18-21	Gr. Boston, Stoneham	4, max. 2	CBC, M.Martinek	
<u>Field Sparrow:</u>				
7,31	Middleboro, Nantucket	3, 2	D.Briggs, E.Andrews	
<u>Savannah Sparrow:</u>				
18,22	E.Boston, Monomoy	9, 12	J.Cumming, W.Petersen#	
<u>"Ipswich" Sparrow:</u>				
16,22	Cape Cod, Newburyport	6, 5	CBC	
27,31	Plymouth, Tuckernuck	16, 9	CBC	
<u>Grasshopper Sparrow:</u>				
16	Winthrop	1	R.Stymeist#	
<u>LeConte's Sparrow:</u>				
16	Cape Cod	1	CBC (R.Heil)	
<u>Sharp-tailed Sparrow:</u>				
16,29	Cape Cod, Dartmouth	4, 3	CBC, T.Raymond	
<u>Seaside Sparrow:</u>				
9,16	Newburyport, Cape Cod	3, 9	R.Heil, CBC	
22	Newburyport	7	CBC	
<u>Fox Sparrow:</u>				
1-21,16	Stoneham, Gr. Boston	max. 4, 11	M.Martinek, CBC	
30	Marshfield, Concord	5, 9	CBC	
<u>Song Sparrow:</u>				
15,16	Buzz Bay, Gr. Boston	407, 468	CBC	
<u>Lincoln's Sparrow:</u>				
16	Lexington	1 (good details)	C.Floyd	
<u>Swamp Sparrow:</u>				
16,22	Cape Cod, Newburyport	124, 25	CBC	
<u>White-throated Sparrow:</u>				
15,30	Buzz Bay, Concord	625, 391	CBC	
<u>White-crowned Sparrow:</u>				
8,15	Arlington, 3 CBCs	1 imm., 4 total	L.Taylor, CBC	
30	Nantucket	1	CBC	
<u>Dark-eyed Junco:</u>				
15,30	Millis, Concord	2386, 1783	CBC	
<u>"Oregon" Junco:</u>				
16	Gr. Boston	1	CBC	
<u>Lapland Longspur:</u>				
2,22	Newburyport, Monomoy	1, 15	F.Hamlen, W.Petersen#	
<u>Snow Bunting:</u>				
1-9,2	P.I., Duxbury	max. 250, 50	v.o., SSBC	
18	Canton	30	J.Hall#	
<u>Red-winged Blackbird:</u>				
1-21,30	E.Middleboro, Concord	50-30, 850	K.Anderson, CBC	
30	Marshfield	1193	CBC	
<u>Eastern Meadowlark:</u>				
12,14	Milford, E.Middleboro	1, 30	C.Quinlan, K.Anderson	
<u>Rusty Blackbird:</u>				
2,9	Middleboro, Medway	12, 12	K.Holmes, W.Reagan	
15,30	Pembroke, Concord	45, 5	E.Pearson, CBC	
<u>Common Grackle:</u>				
16,30	Gr. Boston, Concord	4, 442	CBC	
<u>Brown-headed Cowbird:</u>				
14,20	E.Middleboro, Middleboro	150, 30	K.Anderson, D.Briggs	
26,28	Easton, Whitman	12, 30	R.Titus, W.Petersen	
<u>Northern Oriole:</u>				
16	Westport, Cape Cod	1, 2	CBC	
21	Westwood	1 f.	B.Wicks	

<u>SPECIES/DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>OBSERVERS</u>	<u>DECEMBER 1984</u>
Purple Finch:				
15,16	Millis, New Bedford	102, 73	CBC	
22,30	Newburyport, Concord	60, 245	CBC	
House Finch:				
15,16	Millis, Cape Cod	596, 1288	CBC	
Red Crossbill:				
15	Millis	3	CBC	
White-winged Crossbill:				
15	Quincy	1	CBC	
Common Redpoll:				
15,30	Athol, Concord	22, 3	CBC	
Pine Siskin:				
15,30	Athol, Concord	95, 28	CBC	
American Goldfinch:				
21,30	Milton, Concord	300, 1178	R.Abrams, CBC	
Evening Grosbeak:				
1,4	P.I., Cambridge	20, 22	G.d'Entremont#, L.Robinson	
9,15	S.Middleboro, Athol	35, 883	S.MacDonald, CBC	

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ad.	adult	F.E.	First Encounter Beach, Eastham
alt.	alternate (plumage)	F.H.	Fort Hill, Eastham
b.	banded	F.M.	Fowl Meadow, Milton
br.	breeding	gr.	greater as in Gr. Boston area
dk.	dark (phase)	I.	Island
f.	female	M.V.	Martha's Vineyard
fl.	fledge	Mt.A.	Mt. Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge
imm.	immature	Nant.	Nantucket
ind.	individuals	Newbypt	Newburyport
loc.	locations	P.I.	Plum Island
lt.	light (phase)	P'town	Provincetown
m.	male	R.P.	Race Point, Provincetown
max.	maximum	S.N.	Sandy Neck, Barnstable
migr.	migrating	Stellw.	Stellwagen (Bank)
N.S.E.W.	direction	BBC	Brookline Bird Club
ph.	photographed	BOEM	Bird Observer of Eastern Massachusetts
pl.	plumage	CCBC	Cape Cod Bird Club
pr.	pair	DFWS	Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary
thr.	throughout	GMNWR	Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge
v.o.	various observers	IRWS	Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary
W	winter (2W = second winter)	MAS	Massachusetts Audubon Society
w/	with	MBO	Manomet Bird Observatory
yg.	young	MNWS	Marblehead Neck Wildlife Sanctuary
#	additional observers	ONWR	Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge
A.A.	Arnold Arboretum	PRNWR	Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
A.P.	Andrews Point, Rockport	SRV	Sudbury River Valley
Buzz.	Buzzards (Bay)	SSBC	South Shore Bird Club
C.	Cape as in C.Cod or C.Ann	WBWS	Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary
E.P.	Eastern Point, Gloucester		

I think it was the March Hare who remarked to Alice that it takes a lot of running just to stay in the same place. BIRD OBSERVER apologizes for the inclusion of only one month's Field Records in this issue and promises to do a three-in-one, probably next time.

#### **SPRING PUFFIN CRUISES**

This spring Maine Whalewatch, working with the cooperation of the Puffin Project of the National Audubon Society, will be offering seabird trips geared especially for people wishing to see and photograph puffins and razorbills. All-day trips from Rockland, Maine, will cruise around Seal Island and Maticucus Rock. The cost is \$25 per person and scheduled trips will be on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from May 10 through June 9. For more information and reservations, call 207-288-9595 (Maine Whalewatch).

## FIELD NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE

Swan Song. In the two most recent field guides (NGS and Knopf) vocalizations of Mute Swan are described as: "variety of hisses and snorts" and "variety of low snorts, grunts, and hisses." On February 21, 1985, while taking my daily walk at the Arthur D. Little plant in Cambridge, I saw two of these birds apparently courting. The presumed male - because of its thicker neck and aggressiveness - repeatedly sounded a brief (quarter-second), pretty "krutt" with the "r" pronounced as in Spanish. The bird usually uttered this phrase after lifting its head from the water in which the pair was feeding. This vocalization was soft and low but with a rather sharp quality. It was unique to me; I cannot think of an analog.

Leif J. Robinson, Wellesley

### Sound of the Mute and One Other Seldom Heard - Northern Shrike.

At Rantoul Pond in Ipswich, I paused one morning in March 1985 to check out the waterfowl. The usual pair of Mute Swans was at the front of the pond, where they have nested for years. Whether because of my presence or for other reasons, the cob swam toward me and began issuing a series of loud grunts, each preceded by a much higher-pitched whistle. The two sounds were contiguous, and the pattern was repeated several times at ten-second intervals or so. Then, to my surprise, the pen (female) began grunting; only in her case the whistle followed the grunt. The cob, apparently standing corrected, then changed his tune and put his whistle after the grunt. After a minute or two of tandem grunting, both swans ceased making noises.

At no time during the vocalizations did the two swans appear to be courting. In fact, they were some distance apart, the cob approaching me in the threat posture (wings arched above the back) while the pen stayed where she was. I can only surmise from the swans' behavior that the grunts were related to the defense of their territory - they were awesome sounds, but I can find nothing in the literature to back this up. The field guides do mention grunting, snorting, and hissing sounds but do not link them with behavior, and some of the life histories, such as Bent and Forbush, were written before the North American advent of the species. Readers having knowledge of or experience with "Mute" Swan vocalizations are invited to comment.

Several years ago, in late October, I heard a shrike singing from a tree top in the dunes at Crane Beach in Ipswich. Having no telescope and unable to get close enough to the bird to confidently identify it with binoculars, I noted the variety of calls, whistles, grunts, squeaks, and warbles and headed home to look it up.

What I learned from that episode was that if you ever hear a shrike making noise, don't leave until you have identified it visually, because you will never find a field guide, or any other book, that will enable you to identify it by sound. The guides variously describe shrike vocalizations in terms of "harsh tones," "musical notes," "shek-shek" calls, whistles, screams, squeaks, mews, trills, warbles, and infinite combinations of these. The songs are frequently compared to those of robins, catbirds, and Brown Thrashers.

Unfortunately, the differences in vocalizations between the Northern Shrike (Lanius excubitor) and the Loggerhead Shrike (Lanius ludovicianus) are nowhere clearly described, and, in all probability, are not very great. My favorite comment is in Richard Pough's Audubon Land Bird Guide (1949) where he states (for Loggerhead): "Calls and notes are similar to the northern's. No one seems to be familiar enough with both species to describe the differences" (p. 135).

As if that weren't frustrating enough, neither Peterson phonograph record (Eastern or Western) includes Northern Shrike, and the only Loggerhead "songs" on either one are two-note whistles. The 1983 National Geographic Society's set of recordings, Guide to Bird Sounds, keyed to their new field guide, leaves out many of the common songs in order to concentrate on "the sounds that are most helpful in finding and identifying elusive or confusing species" but then omits the shrikes entirely! Never let it be said that the new field guides and records are a panacea.

Having said all the above, I am not now in a position to tell you all you need to know about shrike vocalizations. I can tell you what one Northern Shrike said to me on one given day. And so far it is the only time I have with certainty heard a Northern Shrike speak.

On March 24, 1985, Ann Blaisdell, Ida Giriunas, and I observed a Northern Shrike on the back side of Crane Beach. The bird was brought to my attention by Mike DeRosa, the tern warden at the Crane Reservation, who had been banding near the boat-launching area. He had told me the day before that the shrike had killed a Song Sparrow that was caught in the mist net. When we arrived the morning of the twenty-fourth, we soon saw the shrike, and Mike, who was banding again, discovered that it had just killed another song sparrow. (In both cases the sparrow's neck was broken; the second victim had been hit so hard that the back of the skull was entirely devoid of feathers.) Soon afterward the shrike perched on an elevated branch and began . . . well, singing. We did not hear the entire gamut of noises, but there was a variety of one-, two-, and four-note calls and whistles. The four-note calls were raspy, whereas the shorter ones were somewhat more melodic. The different sounds were repeated in sequence to some extent without long pauses; for this reason the variety and the rather constant noise did remind one of a catbird, though the patterns were simpler. The bird sang for a couple of minutes, then flew off.

So there it is: a lot of background, a few sentences on the sounds. And that's about the way it is in the field! In twenty years I have heard two shrikes sound off. I don't recall having heard any Loggerheads in the south though I have seen many. I will consider myself very lucky if I hear another shrike within five years. No wonder no one is familiar enough with the songs of both species to tell the difference.

A final note about shrikes. Bent, in the account of the Northern Shrike in his Life Histories of North American Wagtails, Shrikes, Vireos, and Their Allies (1950), gives two instances of singing birds that proved, upon collection, to be females (p. 124). I take heart from this, because it doubles one's chances of hearing a shrike sing - although double zero is still zero, you might be thinking. In any event, I think it is safe to say that shrikes of any description are seldom heard vocalizing in

Massachusetts. Thus it behooves all of us to submit notes to this journal on such happy occurrences, as Ted Davis did in his article on long-term bird population studies [*Bird Observer*, 7 (December 1979): 223]. (Tedeven got to see a Northern Shrike cough up a pellet, which must be a still rarer event.) With the dearth of good information on shrike noises, every little bit helps.

Jim Berry, Ipswich

More Drinking. I would like to add a note to the observations of Mr. Komar in the February issue. Cardinals are not the only species to drink water droplets from trees; many birds including Blue Jays, juncos, and titmice have been observed to do this. On my Most Impressive List is a large flock of decorative Cedar Waxwings sipping at an ice-covered tree in early March. Even during drier weather, some birds, especially chickadees, are very fond of the sap dripping from a backyard maple - fluttering, hummingbird-style, to sip at a maple-flavored icicle. Next year, I may be tossing out pancakes!

Dorothy L. Case, Needham

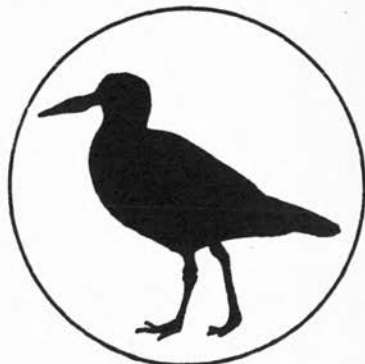
Aerial Combat. Who would think that a crow could compete effectively in the air - one on one - with a Sharpie! Eliot Taylor and I would now say it could, after watching a minute-long aerial battle on February 10, 1985. Over houses along Cape Ann's coast, the Sharpie stooped on the crow - and zinged right on by. Then the crow folded its wings and dropped toward the hawk, falling past it. Then the roles of "who's on top" were reversed, and the whole ballet began again. These sorties seemed very deliberate and fierce during the four or so altercations we watched.

Leif J. Robinson, Wellesley

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## AT A GLANCE - A LOOK ASKANCE

In the December 1984 issue of BIRD OBSERVER, two calidrid sandpipers were offered as puzzlers for the regular bird identification feature, At A Glance. In the February 1985 issue, Dorothy Arvidson attempted to unravel the riddle of their identity, while at the same time inviting the submission of further, if not alternative, reasoning as to the proper identification of the two shorebirds. With this in mind, I offer the following thoughts and impressions.

First, I believe both species are small peep - in fact, both birds are probably very close to the same size, as can be crudely measured with a ruler superimposed on the photograph. Apparently the photographer's angle when he captured these two birds on film was such that the left bird was slightly turned away from the camera, while the bird on the right is obviously turned toward the camera. This positioning seems to exaggerate the bill size of the light-legged bird on the right and, likewise, to shorten the bill of the bird on the left. Additionally, with regard to bill size, since both birds are in juvenile plumage (as Arvidson properly describes), it is therefore possible that neither individual's bill is fully grown, hence further accounting for the apparent shortness of the left bird's bill. When actually measured, approximate though the technique may be, there appears to be only a difference of a millimeter at most (in the photograph) between the two bills.

Second, the leg structure of the two birds seems comparable, although the bird on the left is apparently standing in deeper water. The extent of exposed leg above each joint seems similar, and the dark-legged bird's legs fail to seem sturdy enough to be those of a Sanderling. Similarly, a Pectoral Sandpiper standing so close to a Sanderling should certainly stand visibly taller, especially if standing in shallower water. I believe that if both birds were on terra firma, they would appear the same in stature, if not actually showing the bird on the left to be slightly longer-legged.

If these assumptions are correct to this point, then we have two peep depicted (not a Sanderling and a Pectoral Sandpiper, as suggested by Arvidson) that are comparable in size and proportions, one with dark legs and one with light legs. Based upon size, differential coloring (a light bird on the left and a dark bird on the right), a droopy-tipped, fine-pointed bill on the light-legged bird and a thicker-based, blunt-tipped bill on the dark-legged bird, I believe the birds to be Semipalmated Sandpiper (or Rufous-necked Stint!) on the left and Least Sandpiper on the right. The distinct fine streaks at the sides of the breast are consistent with juvenile-plumaged Least Sandpiper, as shown on the light-legged bird. Pectoral Sandpiper would show a much more heavily streaked breast and would not exhibit so much white in front of the folded wing, a difference due to the more extensive streaking extending farther around the sides of the upper breast.

While the ultimate determination of small sandpipers in juvenile plumage can be tedious even in life, a black-and-white photograph can only compound the problem. Observers are therefore advised to exercise great caution in making identifications from photographs and to remember that characters such as structure are better evaluated than color differences.

John Gavin's portrait of February's bird reveals a heavily streaked and darkly mottled sparrow or finch with two prominent features - a large, conical bill and a prominent white wing patch. The black mottling in patches under the chin, on the wing, and on the underside suggests that this is a molting bird. The streaking in combination with the large bill at once narrows the field. Two birds occur to me: Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Purple Finch. The grosbeak seems a possibility because the beak looks about right. The male Rose-breasted has black feathering and molts to a streaked bird with bold black-and-white flight feathers, but there is no black on the undersides. The broad supraorbital streak so pronounced in the female grosbeak is missing in our bird as are the two wingbars. A female Purple Finch has a more pronounced face pattern than this, a whitish eyebrow, and there is no black in the plumage.

Having eliminated those birds, we flip through the pages of the families Emberizidae and Fringillidae until about half way through the sparrows, we find a ringer for our bird - one with a large bill, a white patch on the wing, streaked plumage and, the field guide says, "some males in winter have some blackish mottling on the underparts." (Master Guide to Birding, 3: 246). This is a male LARK BUNTING in winter plumage, a bird of the western prairies who arrived in Massachusetts in the late summer of 1978, showing a lot of black feathers, and stayed long enough to molt into the bird pictured. *Calamospiza melanocorys*, formerly classified a fringillid, is now a part of the potpourri of warblers, tanagers, cardinals, grosbeaks, buntings, sparrows, and icterids that is known as the family Emberizidae.

D.R.A.



Lark Bunting

Photo by John Gavin  
Courtesy of MAS

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ROBERT F. PEASE IS ALIVE AND WELL and still living on Howland Lane in East Sandwich. He wishes to announce that his book about the birds of Sandwich will be in print this spring.

# At a Glance . . .

Photo by Wayne R. Petersen



Can you identify this bird? Identification will be discussed in next issue's *At a Glance*. Bird Observer will award a PRIZE to the reader who submits the most correct answers in 1985. Please send your entry on a postcard to Bird Observer, 462 Trapelo Road, Belmont, MA 02178 before the answer is published.

## THE WINNER

The winner of the 1984 At a Glance Contest for correctly identifying four of the five photos - December's birds were not included because their identification is in dispute - is KAREN HOLMES, Lakeville, and the prize is a \$25 book certificate. Congratulations, Karen!



*Happy 200th Birthday,  
John J. Audubon  
April 26, 1985*

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