

BIRD OBSERVER

OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS



JAN.-FEB. 1973

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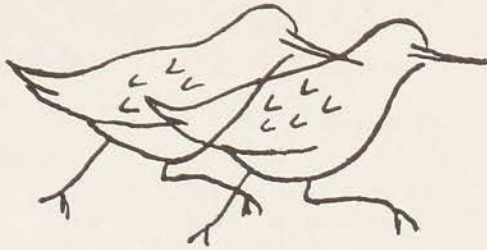
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WHY BIRD OBSERVER OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS?

Many birders, newcomers and old-timers, have expressed an interest in and a need for an informative regional publication of purely bird news.

This bi-monthly newsletter plans to cover: where to go for "hard to find" species and seasonal species complete with maps, fine points of identification of confusing species, tips to backyard birders and for those using public transportation, statistics of previous two months plus a two-month forecast, occasional book reviews and conservation notes.

Year-round birding has become a rapidly expanding hobby in this country in recent years. During the 1969 Christmas count over 15,000 people participated, in 1970, 16,700 and in 1971, 18,800 - a gain of 12% per annum, with Massachusetts being one of the most active states. These numbers represent only the tip of the iceberg - surely the bulk of enthusiasts are watching backyard feeders.

In order for this publication to serve you and succeed, all clubs and individuals are asked to give support by reporting species, submitting articles, writing letters and questions to the editors, sharing bird interest stories, and giving criticism and suggestions for future expansion.

We look forward to your participation.

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FEEDING WINTER BIRDS

Eliot Taylor, Sherborn

In winter many kind-hearted people will put up feeders and watch the birds come to enjoy the free meals. There are hundreds of feeder designs to choose from, at a wide range of prices. But my neighbor simply throws seed onto the ground. Another person, however, has removed the lower half of his kitchen window and installed a two-foot glass-sided box so that his birds can come inside to eat. For many years my feeder was a pie plate nailed to an old tree stump.

Before you start to feed birds, you should consider the following: Do any of your neighbors feed birds? Will pigeons, squirrels, raccoons, or starlings be a problem? Will you be able to offer the birds the same amount of food each day until mid-April?

If your neighbors feed birds, ask them to list the species they have and to describe any problems. If you live in a thickly settled area, you will no doubt have trouble with pigeons. They are beautiful birds, but large, numerous and dirty. They eat until all of the seed is gone, and then they will roost on the roof of your house for hours, waiting for more feed. Pigeons have difficulty clinging to small perches, so they cannot eat from most of the small hanging feeders. Also, by placing chicken wire fences under the feeders, you can stop the pigeons from getting any grain that falls to the ground.

Squirrels are clever acrobats that can climb or jump onto most types of feeders. They have sharp teeth and can do much damage by chewing through the sides of feeders. About the only way to stop squirrels is to place baffle plates around the feeder posts or hangers. One fellow puts 12 in. phonograph records on the wires that hold his feeders. When a squirrel tries to climb over the records, they tip and turn until the thief falls to the ground.

Raccoons are large and so strong that they can rip feeders apart. If they become a problem, I recommend that you take your feeders indoors at night.

If you have cats in your neighborhood, I would suggest that you place your feeders in the open, 15 or 20 feet from any dense bush or other hiding place. Birds understand cats well, and it is usually the weak or injured that get caught. Birds will often eat within 20 feet of a sleeping cat. But when the cat wakes up, the birds will fly to a nearby tree and wait for it to leave.

Starlings and House (English) sparrows often become a problem, due to their large numbers. Anything that you do to discourage them, such as using wire cages or weight-sensitive perches, will also eliminate most of your choice birds. Yet, a diet of sunflower or thistle seed will help to keep them away, since they do not eat unshelled sunflower seed and are not fond of thistle.

Once you start to feed, put out the same amount of feed at about the same time each day. During severe weather, supply extra portions. After a few weeks, you should be able to ascertain the time it takes for the feeders to empty and how much money you want to spend. Ration the food daily, and let

the birds fight over it. Your local flock will quickly become established; they will know what to expect from you and what to expect from each other.

To start, I recommend three hanging-type feeders. Plastic ones that hold about a pint of seed are inexpensive and good looking. However, during freezing rain and snow, the openings that dispense the seeds are apt to become frozen. Feeders that have large openings are less apt to clog and will be easier to clean. Fill one feeder with thistle seed, one with sunflower seed, and the third with mixed wildbird feed and cracked corn.

Goldfinches, Pine siskins and redpolls will quickly take over the thistle seed feeder. Chickadees, Tufted titmice, Nuthatches, Evening grosbeaks, Blue jays and Purple finches will find the sunflowers, while Tree, Song, House, White-throated, and Fox sparrows, as well as Juncoes, Starlings and Cowbirds will go to the mixed feed.

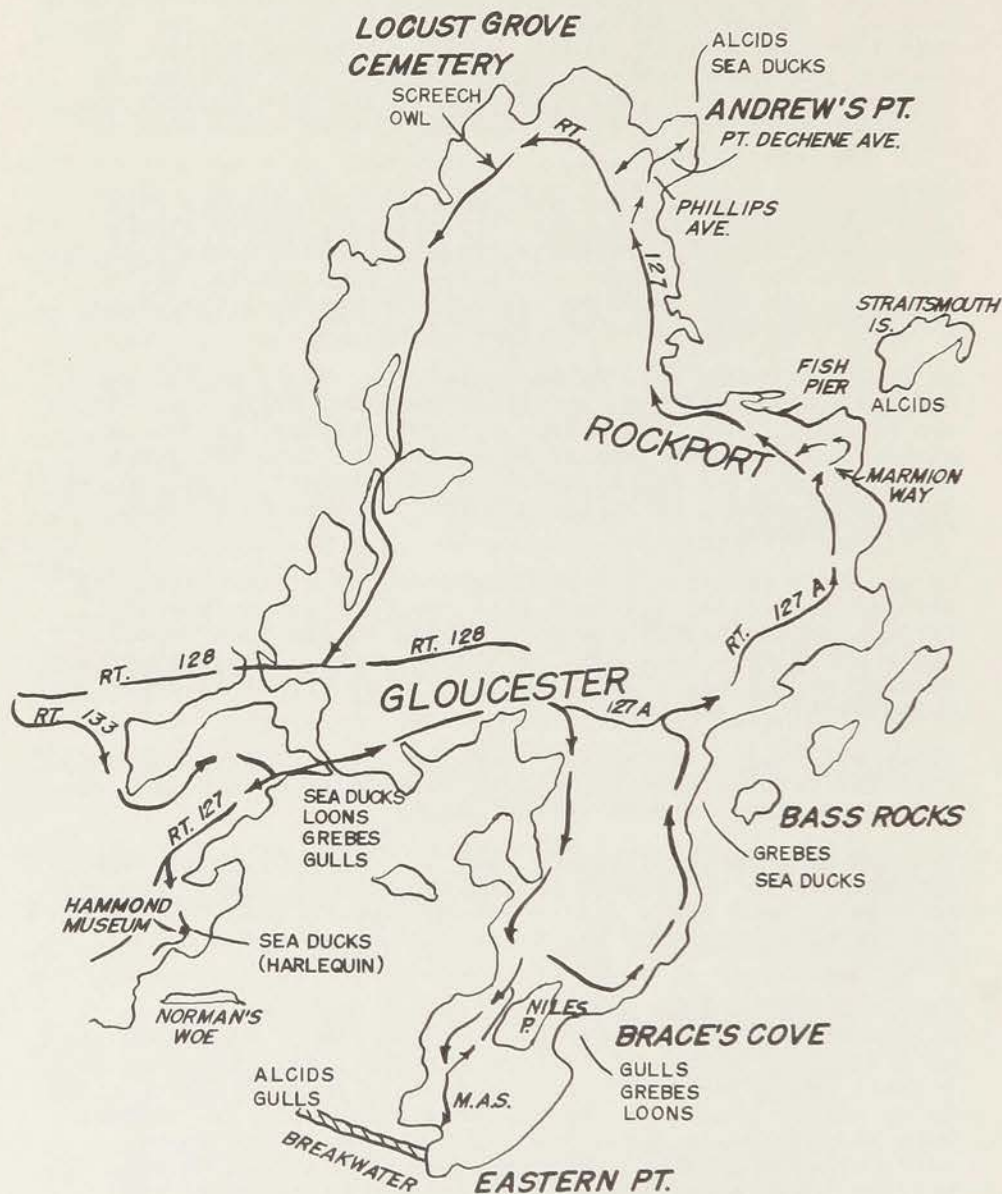
In addition, suet will attract Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, Chickadees, Nuthatches, and unfortunately, Starlings. You can buy one of the many types of suet feeders, or you can simply put the suet into an onion bag and hang it from a tree branch. You can also make a suet holder by nailing an eight-inch square of hardware wire to a tree or a board, forming a pocket.

If you have Cardinals or Mockingbirds, or a rare wintering Catbird or Oriole, put up a flat shelf or window feeder. Cardinals love peanut hearts and shelled sunflower seeds, while the others will want raisins, grapes, suet, doughnuts, chopped apples and other fruit. Orioles also like sugar or honey-water in red containers.

Pheasants, Bob-white quail, Mourning doves, Ducks, and Geese will eat cracked corn or chicken scratch feed (cracked corn and wheat mixed) thrown on the ground.

You can save money by buying feed in 50 or 100 pound bags and storing it in covered galvanized rubbish cans. You may have to go to a grain dealer to get seed in quantity, though your local supermarket may be able to get it at a reduced price.

Remember, birds also need water during the winter: the colder it gets, the harder water is to find. Now there are good electric bird-bath heaters available for less than \$10. I shall never forget watching some Starlings splashing about in my heated bird bath one winter morning when the temperature was six below zero. They must have well-insulated, water-proofed feathers, because they didn't seem to mind the icicles that formed around the edge of the steaming bowl.



WINTER COASTAL BIRDING-CAPE ANN

A GOOD DAY AT CAPE ANN

Herman D'Entremont, Newton

For me the New Year began at 7 A.M. as I headed north on Rte. 128 toward Cape Ann. Yesterday my year list totaled 307, but today, 1972 was as empty as the Martin houses at Plum Island.

After entering the Gloucester city limits, a right turn on Rte. 133 brought me to the harbor. At the intersection of Rte. 127, also known as Western Avenue, I made another right. Hesperus Avenue, the road to Magnolia intersects at 1.4 miles, where a left and 0.8 miles more took me to the Hammond Museum, my first stop.

To get to the sea overlook, I walked down the driveway. The nearest land jutting into Gloucester Harbor is Mussel Point, to the north (left). From November through March this vantage often yields Harlequins, which can also be found to the south near a large island known as "Norman's Woe Rock."

Across the harbor mouth stands the lighthouse at the end of the breakwater at Eastern Point, which I shall visit later. The sun had not been up too long and was shining in my eyes when I looked seaward. My list now read: Red-breasted merganser, Common goldeneye, and Common loon. Yet this area can also provide Great cormorant, all three scoters Common eider, Bufflehead, Greater scaup, Oldsquaw, and possibly King Eider.

Returning to Gloucester, I saw a small flock of Snow buntings in Stage Fort Park. Near the famous Fisherman's Statue there were Great cormorant, Horned grebe, Common eider, and more Common goldeneye. This is also a good spot to search for wintering Barrow's goldeneye and white-winged gulls.

At the intersection of Rtes. 127 and 128, I turned right onto East Main Street, the scenic shore drive, toward Eastern Point. Approaching this landmark, one finds two stone pillars with a sign that states that the area is private. A guard is stationed here in summer, and if a birder is stopped he should say that he is going to the Massachusetts Audubon Society sanctuary at Eastern Point; your membership card may be necessary.

This road follows the shore to the right for 1.4 miles, through a second set of pillars to a parking lot at the Coast Guard station, where a sign painted on a rock tells this is for the M.A.S. Note the breakwater extending from the Coast Guard station southward into Gloucester harbor.

Though it was bitter cold and windy, I walked to the end of the breakwater, and was rewarded with: Horned grebe, Common loon, Great cormorant, Common eider, Razorbill, Thick-billed murre, Bufflehead, Red-breasted merganser, Dovekie, Purple sandpiper, and Black guillemot. A Short-eared owl even flew overhead toward land. Alcids and an owl in the same place!

Driving back toward the stone pillars, I stopped at Nile's Pond. Depending on the weather and the ice on the pond, one can find Glaucous and Iceland gulls mixed in with the Black-

backs and Herrings. Before reaching the pillars, I turned right onto S-shaped Bemo Avenue to a beach called Brace's Cove. The rocks on both sides of the cove's entrance hold food for Purple sandpipers. On the beach were Killdeer, Dunlin, and Sanderling; on the water, gulls - Iceland, Bonaparte's, Ring-billed, Black-backed, and the ever-present Herrings. This place is also frequented by Horned and Red-necked grebes, loons, scoters, and other sea ducks.

One should continue northward toward Rockport along Atlantic Road; a small pine grove on the right often shelters Red and White-winged crossbills. Many sea ducks congregate in the frequent inlets along this rocky coast. At one such place, called Bass Rocks, opposite Windmere Road and the Moorland Motor Inn, an Eared grebe has been seen for eight consecutive years. He was not here today, but Horned grebes and Buffleheads were.

I continued along Atlantic Road until it joined Route 127A, Thacher Road, which I followed to Rockport town limits. I then turned right along Marmion Way. An old Coast Guard tower stands on a rocky ledge at "Straitsmouth" where one can find wintering Alcids, Grebes, and both Common and King eiders.

Just a couple of hundred feet offshore is Straitsmouth Island, owned by M.A.S. There I hoped to see a Snowy owl or Sparrow hawk. A flock of King eiders wintered there in 1970-71, and for two weeks in January, 1970, a Red phalarope was seen.

Driving on, I turned right onto Oldgarden Road, where there is a little park at the intersection of Marraden Avenue. There I looked for Red-necked and Horned grebes as well as Iceland gulls. Farther on I turned left at Norwood Avenue then right at Highland to Mount Pleasant Street, which is 127A to Rockport Center.

The Rockport Fishpier, at the foot of Broadway, is favored by Alcids and White-winged gulls, but I continued along Route 127 toward Pigeon Cove. After passing the Cape Ann Tool Co., I turned right onto U-shaped Philips Avenue and continued straight through the next intersection. Past the Waldo Emerson Inn is a stone slope where a Rock wren stayed for four weeks, December 1965 to January 1966. But in any year this location is a good overlook for Barrow's golden-eyes, Red-necked grebes, and other sea ducks.

Returning to the intersection, I made a right at Philips Avenue and continued to bear right to Point Dechene Avenue, which leads to Andrews Point. Another right brought me to a stone wall and a view of a rocky point where one or two Black guillemots usually winter. Here, too, all the Alcids have been found at one time or another. This site is excellent during northeasters, when Kittiwakes, Shearwaters, Gannets, Phalaropes, Jaegers, and Leach's petrels, among others, can be blown by. Yet it is a good idea to check all the overlooks around Andrew's Point in any weather.

Now I continued along Route 127 toward Gloucester via Annisquam, arriving at the Locust Grove Cemetery. Turning right at the second entrance to the cemetery, across from a Texaco gas station, I parked near a small building. By climbing a knoll adjacent to the right side of the road, I could peer directly across the road into a hole about 30 feet high, in the crook of a large branch. There, as he has been for five years, was the resident Screech owl.

It was getting late. As I turned homeward along Route 127, I began to think of the many fine restaurants in the Rockport-Gloucester area, a fitting way to celebrate a fine day of winter birding. For the hardy, yes, but a way to turn our "poorest" season into one of the best.

BOOK REVIEW

Brunn, Bertel and Arthur Singer, The Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain and Europe (Hamlyn Publishing Group Ltd., 1970 London, New York.)

It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to see this excellent guide, the format of which is similar to that of Birds of North America by Robbins et al; this is hardly surprising as Mr. Brunn is one of the authors of the latter, and Mr. Robbins was a consultant on the former.

I found the Hamlyn Guide superior in many ways to other European guides such as my own Collins Guide to British Birds. The 1971 reprint edition is a 319-page paperback that seems to be well bound and Singer's color illustrations are good. It should be invaluable to anyone planning to visit Great Britain or Europe; for the non-traveller, it would be a source of information and pleasure.

The approximate equivalent of the price in Britain is \$3.50, although the cost might well be higher through a United States bookseller.

Arbib, R. and T. Soper, The Hungry Bird Book (Ballantine Books, N.Y.)

Robert Arbib's American revision of the successful English book by Tony Soper is a sensible, delightful paperback which probably has something in it to interest everyone, from tyro to connoisseur. In its 150 pages, it contains an amazing amount of practical information for anyone who wants to attract and provide both natural and contrived food and housing for birds. In addition to the chapters on plantings, feeding stations, nesting boxes, poisons, and so on, there are several excellent short appendices and a reasonably good vocabulary.

A.H.

PARALYTIC SHELLFISH POISONING
IN THE NORTH SHORE AREA OF
MASSACHUSETTS -
September - October 1972

During early September 1972, the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge located on the North Shore of Massachusetts began to receive reports of large numbers of dead black ducks, Anas rubripes, being seen in tidal areas in and around the refuge. These reports were immediately checked out and were found to be valid. A regular system of surveillance, patrol and pickup of birds was started using small boats and 4-wheel drive vehicles in and around the Parker River Refuge. When the final tally was made in mid-October of birds actually picked up dead in this die-off of unknown cause, 391 black ducks, 180 gulls and a scattering of other species of water birds had been found. The final estimated total of black ducks killed in this die-off was 1,600 over 95% of which were adult birds.

What was the cause of this mortality? The culprit in this case turned out to be a microscopic one-celled planktonic organism called Gonyaulax tamarensis. This marine dinoflagellate, which normally is present in sea water along the Atlantic coast in modest numbers, apparently found environmental conditions ideal in late summer and early fall of 1972 and underwent a massive "population explosion." The number of organisms were so abundant during a portion of the outbreak that they gave a noticeable reddish color to the water, even though the problem was not considered a true "red tide" such as is seen in Florida and Gulf Coast area of the United States. These organisms flooded into the intertidal zone with the tides and were ingested by various species of molluscs, particularly the filter feeding soft-shell clams, Mya arenaria and blue mussels, Mytilus edulis. When these shellfish ingest and accumulate the one-celled dinoflagellate in their systems and the organism dies, it releases a potent neuro-toxin, which causes respiratory failure and cardiac arrest and can be lethal to man and certain species of birds when they feed upon the infected shellfish. This poison is known as Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) and was a new and unique experience to the refuge.

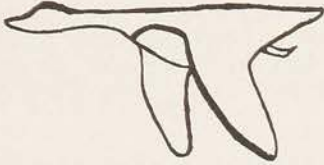
Adult black ducks of the coastal region in this locale are conditioned to feeding on blue mussels and other molluscs as available in the intertidal zone. Stomach analysis of a sample of over 20 adults killed in the outbreak revealed blue mussels in over 80% of those checked, and indicated their importance in the feeding ecology of this segment of the waterfowl population at this time of year. Young birds in contrast must learn and develop this feeding pattern as they spend their first fall and winter along the coast. This is an important factor in why the early fall kill was confined largely to adult waterfowl. The young birds had not learned to feed on mussels yet!

Coincidentally with the bird kill, 30 cases of PSP in humans were noted during the outbreak and fortunately there were no fatalities. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health instituted a closure on the digging of shellfish as a result of the problem. The states of New Hampshire and Maine followed this procedure at this time also. In late December the clam flats were still closed and samples

were being tested on a weekly schedule to measure the detoxification rate.

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning is a natural phenomenon which has proven to be very lethal under certain conditions to coastal black ducks and other species of mollusc-eating birds in this area. It remains to be seen if this is a "one shot" problem (1972 only) or if it develops into an endemic condition which may occur in future years.

Prepared by: William Forward



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WINTERING BALD EAGLES AT QUABBIN RESERVOIR

Herman D'Entremont, Newton

Quabbin Reservoir is located on Route 9 in Ware, about 40 miles west of Worcester. When its waters freeze, the deer that summer on its islands, try to go ashore to find food. Sometimes they fall on the ice, breaking a leg. Unable to move, the deer starve to death, providing a ready supply of meat for the eagles.

The best sites for viewing these birds are from the Headquarters parking lot, near Winsor Dam at the south end of the reservoir, or, even better, from Enfield Lookout, between the dam and Quabbin Dike near the stone tower. The latter has a large parking lot, where there is a green wooden sign that tells the history of the area.

But - during winter - Quabbin Reservoir is one of the coldest and windiest places I know!

JOKE

Once there was a boy who wanted a bird. He went down to the store and said to the man, "I want some bird seed." The man said, "What kind of bird do you have?" The boy said, "I want to grow one."

Holly Butler

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WINTER GULLS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Philip Martin, Newton

Everyone knows a "seagull". They are numerous and probably the most conspicuous birds of our coast. But, what people call "plain old seagulls" may be any number of different kinds; as may as nine species regularly winter in Massachusetts. This article is intended to provide the basic information required to sort out these birds. Two terms are often used to describe gulls: the mantle or the upper surface of the wings as well as the large portion of back between the wings, and the primary feathers, which are the large feathers on the trailing edge of the outer wing (see illustration).

The Herring gull is the most abundant and widespread. Adults have a white head and neck, white tail, gray mantle; their black wing tips have a few spots of white. The bill is yellowish with a red spot, and the legs are pink. The bird is familiar to most people.

But, to confuse matters, gulls have different plumages depending on their age. Young Herring gulls in their first winter are mottled gray-brown over the entire body, but with the tail and the primary wing feathers slightly darker. In its second winter, the Herring gull's underparts, throat, and forehead become whitish, though often streaked or mottled with brown; the back becomes grayer and the rump lighter. Between the second winter and adult status, the head, neck, underparts, rump, and tail grow even lighter as the back becomes grayer. Then, in the fourth autumn, the bird attains full adult plumage, as described above.

Not all gulls take four years to mature; many of the smaller species take only two. One must remember that in all gulls there are intermediate plumages so many individual birds do not fit exactly the descriptions, but if one knows the sequence he can figure out the in-betweens. Once you have become familiar with Herring gulls in the field, they can be used as a basis for comparing other species.

The adult Great blacked-backed gull is unmistakable. It is much larger than the Herring gull and its white underparts conspicuously contrast the dark slate mantle even at great distances. The immature Great black-back follows roughly the same plumage sequence as the Herring gull, but with less brown and a mantle that noticeable contrasts with the rest of the body. This dichotomy grows until the fourth year, when the Black-back attains its striking adult attire. In all stages, the head and beak of the Great black-back is stouter than the Herring's.

The adult Ring-billed gull has basically the same pattern as the Herring gull. However, when both species are seen simultaneously, the Ring-billed is conspicuously smaller with a black ring around its yellow bill. Also, in contrast to the Herring gull, Ring-bills have greenish-yellow legs. In flight, the Ring-bill shows more dark on the under-side of the primaries. The immature is much like the second winter Herring gull, but it has a narrow (approximately one-inch wide) band near the end of the tail while the immature Herring gull's tail terminates in a broad dark band. Leg color is not reliable to distinguish young Ring-bills from young Herring

gulls since young Ring-bills can have pinkish legs.

These three gulls are permanent residents in our state - they are found throughout the year. Two gulls that breed mainly in the Arctic, the Glaucous and Iceland, can be found in Massachusetts from about the end of November through the third week of May. Known collectively as the "white-winged" gulls, their plumage sequences are very similar.

In their first winter they are a mottled, very pale buff, almost cream color, with whitish primaries. The first winter Herrings, remember, are dark with slightly darker primaries. By their second winter the Glaucous and Iceland gulls carry a striking nearly pure white over their entire body. Adults also have a white body, though with very pale grey mantle and whitish primaries. To tell these two apart, one must rely mainly on size, by comparison with other gulls. The Iceland is the size of a Herring, while the Glaucous is usually the size of a Great black-backed. A few Glaucous gulls, however, match the size of Icelands. In this case one must look at the head and bill, which on the Glaucous are large in relation to the body, a characteristic not found in the Iceland. If the bird is at rest, look at the relation of wing tips to the tail: in the Iceland the wings extend beyond the tail, and vice versa in the Glaucous. Since the Iceland is usually far more common here, one should "count" only typically large Glaucous gulls, at least until familiar with both of these white-winged gulls.

Another gull that comes to us from its nesting grounds in the north is the Black-legged Kittiwake. This ocean-going gull can be seen any time between September and March, most often when strong easterly winds blow it close to shore, although I have seen Kittiwakes skimming low over the ocean on calm winter days from places like Andrew's Point, Rockport. The adults resemble small Herring gulls except that the black wing-tips are in the shape of a sharply defined triangle and lack the white terminal spots of the Herring gull, giving the Kittiwake's wingtips a distinctive appearance often described as "dipped in ink." The immature Kittiwake has a bold wing pattern, with a black leading edge of the outer wing and a dusky bar running from the forward bend diagonally back to the center of the wing's base, forming a zig-zag pattern. It also has a black "collar" on the back of the neck.

The smallest of our common gulls is the Bonaparte's, which can be seen in Massachusetts at any time of year, except the latter three weeks of June when it nests in Canada. In the adult's non-breeding plumage, (breeding plumage is the same except that the head is black), the Bonaparte's has a white head with a dark spot behind the eye, gray mantle except for conspicuous white triangular patches on the leading part of the wingtips, and a white rump and tail. The immature has a head pattern similar to the winter adult, but the white triangles on the wings are less sharply defined and are broken with dark marks. There is also a dusky diagonal bar across the wing similar to the immature Kittiwake's and a thin black band across the tail close to its tip.

In addition to these seven native gulls there are two Old World species that are uncommon though surprisingly regular visitors in their favored spots such as Newburyport harbor. These are the Black-headed and Little gull. They are often found in association with the Bonaparte's and like that species, the adults acquire dark hoods in summer, (absurdly, the Black-headed is the only one that gets a dark brown not black head), but we seldom see them in this plumage.

The rarer of the two is the Little gull. It is noticeably smaller than a Bonaparte's, the adults having solid light gray mantle--no black on wingtips--and striking dark gray over the entire undersurface of the wings. These marks are diagnostic. The immature can be identified by its small size and Kittiwake-like wing pattern.

The black-headed gull is very similar to the Bonaparte's in appearance. In the adult the bill is red, in contrast to the black bill of the Bonaparte's in all plumages. Furthermore, the under surface of the primaries is conspicuous dark smoky gray, which, under decent light conditions, can be seen at a fair distance. The immature Black-headed is extremely similar to the immature Bonaparte but note the following differences: the bill is proportionally larger, being yellow with a black tip; there is a black band at the very end of the tail whereas Bonaparte's has a tiny white terminal band beyond the black band; in flight the white triangles on the wings do not contrast as much with the rest of the Black-headed's lighter wings; the under surface of the primaries in an immature Black-headed is at first as light as Bonaparte's but later darkens. Both adult and immature birds exhibit these helpful characteristics: the Bonaparte's wingbeats are more rapid like a tern's; also, in proportion to the body, the wings of the Bonaparte's are slimmer than the Black-headed, again tern-like.

Some of these last field marks might seem to be quite subtle. Certainly, there are times when poor viewing conditions preclude the certain identification of some individual gulls. Hence, don't be afraid to write question marks in your records. As you gain experience, the subtleties will become more obvious. Once you know the common species, keep an eye out for any of the really rare gulls that have been seen on the New England coast: the Ivory, Sabine's, Franklin's, Mew (or Common as it is known in Europe) and Lesser black-backed.*

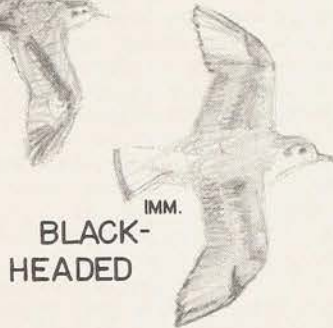
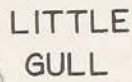
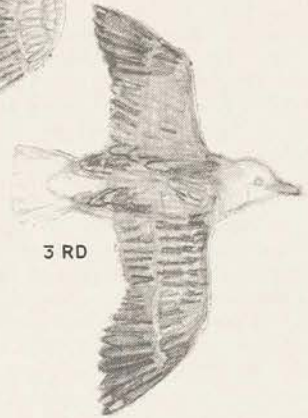
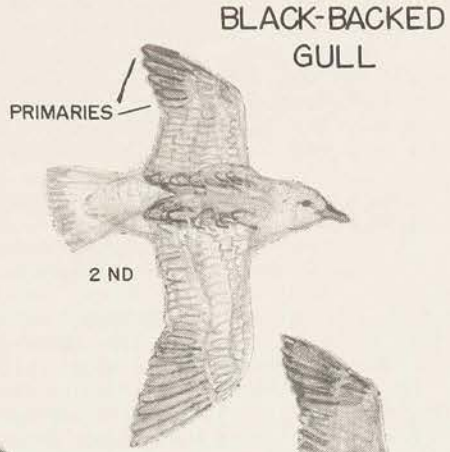
Now get out in the field and take a second look at those seagulls. You might discover a bird you've never seen before.

*

For further information on these and all other gulls discussed here, see:

Peterson, Roger Tory. A Field Guide to the Birds, 1947; A Field Guide to Western Birds, 1961; Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Robbins, Chandler S., Bartel Bruun, and Herbert S. Zim. Birds of North America. New York: Golden Press, 1966.



THE BIRD OBSERVER SUMMARY FOR NOVEMBER

When November arrives we realize that the fall migration has nearly ended. However, for the sharp-eyed observer there are always a few stragglers to find along with the newly arrived winter birds. Weather was rather unsettled in November with several "northeasters" creating some excitement birdwise, but one had to be at favored spots coastwise to appreciate it. Inland, the feeling was that winter would be severe as many species were departing from yards where normally they last through December. All in all there were many interesting observations during the month.

A fine count of 75 Ruddy Ducks was made by N. Powell on the 1st at Accoaxet. Also on the first at Squantum E. Simmons found 62 Laughing Gulls while nearby George Wilson observed 6 White-crowned Sparrows, both species being holdovers from the greater numbers of October. Seven Redheads were seen at Horn Pond, Woburn, by M. McClellan while 35 Canvasbacks remained at Braintree Great Pond from the 1st through the 23rd. Shorebirds continued into the month with a Marbled Godwit coming to Newburyport on the 3rd and 2,000 Dunlin on the 4th. The 4th also produced Red-necked Grebe at Plum Island where Phil Parsons saw a Common Egret. A minor flight of Northern Shrikes occurred on the 4th with 3 at Plum Island and 5 others reported, including one banded at Middleboro, and one singing in Annisquam. At Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, Concord, over 300 Mute Swans were gathered and a Rusty Blackbird was seen. Tree Sparrows were noted coming in on the 4th and the annual early winter flock of 500 Snow Buntings was at Salisbury.

A Brookline Bird Club trip on the 5th, led by Steve Grinley, noted a Cooper's Hawk at Fall River airport. In the Westport area they observed a Rusty Blackbird and a Tree Swallow. Their observation of 20 Red Crossbills was followed by sightings of many small groups throughout Eastern Massachusetts. Dick Forster saw a Cooper's Hawk in Orleans on the 5th. On the 6th a final Snowy Egret was seen at Plum Island while an interesting Goshawk was observed by Ed Homer at Mount Auburn Cemetery. This species occurred more frequently than usual this fall with 7 reports in our area mostly at the end of the month.

On the 7th the news of a Monk Parakeet using an old squirrel's nest and reshaping it to fit its needs was made public. The bird had been present in Braintree since the summer and was in the company of a smaller parakeet. Several Monk Parakeets have been observed in our area in the last year and apparently some of them are "wild" birds from the more southern colonies of New York or Virginia. Perhaps before we run to our lists to check them off we should investigate wherever possible as it was learned that the Braintree bird had indeed escaped from a neighborhood cage. The first Glaucous Gull reported was from Niles Pond, Gloucester, November 9 where an uncommon Vesper Sparrow was also found. Stella Garrett saw the season's first recorded Snowy Owl on the north shore on the 9th, although Wallace Bailey saw one as early as the 2nd at Provincetown.

Next came one of the northeast storms which conveniently produced many birds for the birders out during the 10th through the 12th. When the northeast wind which blows the pelagic birds into Massachusetts bay swings around to the northwest then they are blown close to land at First Encounter Beach, Eastham. Many birders were there from B. B. C., Belmont Bird Club, Needham Bird Club, and South Shore Bird Club. Highlights of the pelagics were: Manx Shearwater, 1000 Gannets, 1000 Brant, 50 Red and 9 Northern Phalaropes, 1 Pomarine and 6 Parasitic Jaegers, a Skua, 75 Greater Shearwaters, Sabine's and Little Gulls, 3,000 Kittiwakes, 3 Razorbills, 150 Dovekies. A Leach's Petrel was picked up hurt at Menemsha, Martha's Vineyard, and later died. Thousands of Gannets flowed past Nantucket, with a Wood Duck at Race Point, Provincetown. Other interesting birds observed because of club activity included: a Western Kingbird at Nauset by Sibley Higgenbotham, a Red-eyed Vireo at Truro by Robert Fox, 15 Field Sparrows at Truro, a Solitary Vireo and 8 - 10 Pine Grosbeaks at Monomoy by Paul Millotis and Wallace Bailey, Golden Plover at Monomoy, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at Brace's Cove by Helen Bates and the Allen Bird Club, Peregrine at Plum Island and Baird's Sandpiper

at Newburyport. Inland at Littleton Jim Baird saw 65 Ringnecked Ducks and 5 Common Mergansers.

November 15, 16 saw more evidence of wind-driven seabirds and these were spiced with some uncommon fall waifs. At First Encounter Beach there were 2 to 3 Fulmars, 25 Greater Shearwaters, one Manx Shearwater, 13 Leach's Petrels, 150 Red Phalaropes, Forster had one Pomarine and 4 Parasitic Jaegers and a Skua, 1500 Black-legged Kittiwakes, 25 Razorbills and one Thick-billed Murre. A Sharp-shinned Hawk was in Tewksbury. Late shorebirds included a Hudsonian Godwit in Newburyport and Quincy by David Brown and 3 Short-billed Dowitchers in Edgartown, M. V. According to Wayne Petersen a Clay-colored Sparrow was at Corn Hill, Truro, between the 16th and the 18th. Although only 4 Redpolls had been reported Brown found a flock of 25 in Walpole on the 16th. One of the best birds of the month was a Black-headed Grosbeak which spent one day at Mrs. Johnson's feeder in Rockport. Herman D'Entremont and Paula Butler were fortunate and confirmed this bird.

On the 18th Robert Stymeist found 211 Snow Buntings at Crane's Beach, Ipswich, and watched a Fulmar move by Andrews Point, Rockport. Twenty-five Red Crossbills were in West Newbury and Ipswich Sparrows were found in Marshfield (3) and Plum Island (2). Petersen counted 50,000 scoters off Monomoy, mostly White-winged, and had 18 Hooded Mergansers also, on the Monomoy ponds, and later a Goshawk at Fort Hill, Eastham. On the 19th two European Widgeon were found on Sider's Pond, Falmouth by the Maxims. Five Gadwalls were at Corn Hill and 2 Long-billed Marsh Wrens were seen. Petersen reported a Gyrfalcon at the south end of Monomoy sitting on a post, probably the same bird seen by Bailey on the 12th. Clapper Rails could be found at several spots on the Cape at high tide when they were forced to walk on high ground. There was a fine flock of 100 White-winged Crossbills in Cambridge on the 20th. Also on the 20th an Ipswich Sparrow was found again at the Boston Harbor Marina in Squantum. This species is almost an annual event there in the marshes or field opposite the Squantum causeway. Being considerably away from sand dunes or open ocean water the locality is a bit unusual for Ipswich Sparrow.

The last week of November continued what was certainly a fine month of bird observations. A Red-necked Grebe could readily be found at Plum Island and 50 Great Cormorants were found at Cape Ann by the Brookline Bird Club on the 25th. They had displaced the Double-crests at last, although there were still several Double-crested Cormorants lingering into November in Wollaston Bay. An American Bittern was observed on Plum Island on the 25th following the careful count by Petersen and Goodrich of 16,550 Black Ducks of the 24th! A Goshawk was found in the Newburyport-Plum Island area on the 24th and 25th by Petersen, Gerald Soucy and others. In fact, the 25th was an exciting day around Eastern Massachusetts as the following birds will show: 700 Brant at Eastham (B.B.C. - D'Entremont), Gadwall at Orleans (Petersen), European Widgeon at Niles Pond, Gloucester (B.B.C. - Grinley), Barrow's Goldeneye at Emerson Inn, Rockport (C. Baines), a Greater Yellowlegs at Nauset (Petersen), a COMMON MURRE at Provincetown by Bailey was one of the two very rare alcids to visit our state and one that requires close examination by experienced eyes, a Great Horned Owl was calling in mid-afternoon in Eastham (Petersen) and the rare Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker was observed at Truro by Bailey. There were several reports throughout the state on that occasion evidencing an arrival from northerly areas although the birds did not stay. Two other outstanding finds were cataloged for the 25th and 26th. A Varied Thrush appeared for one day in an area where the local resident did not wish people to come in and disturb the yard. Unfortunately this has happened several times in the last year or so. At least two Varied Thrushes appeared within easy driving distance of Boston but the people having them preferred not to advertise. We certainly can't blame them for this and we are reminded to always be discreet when visiting a feeder. We should not enter a yard unless invited and certainly not in a maddening crowd. We should also be quiet and still and give the birds a chance to use the feeder. Most of us observe these simple rules of etiquette but I can remember visiting one home where 22 people were standing together, talking in loud voices, gesturing with their hands, all within 10 feet of the suet feeder. If I were a rare bird I certainly would not come close to that feeder and this one did not, nor was it seen

again!! Fortunately the next bird appeared in a yard where the polite birders were invited in for a close scrutiny. An apparent ASH-THROATED FLYCATCHER occurred at Eastern Point, Gloucester where it was identified by people familiar with it in the west (Stephen Hartey, B.B.C. et al). This would probably be the first sight record of the species from Massachusetts. It was noted to be smaller than a Crested Flycatcher, having a rufous tail, whitish wing bars, and was heard calling. It was attracted to Yew berries and as there was sufficient cover in the neighborhood it stayed until at least the following weekend when it responded to a tape recording for Alvah Sanborn.

Other interesting birds for November included a Snowy Owl at Plum Island on the 24th which has remained the only reliable one in Eastern Massachusetts this winter. Don Alexander saw 20 Pintails on Plum Island on the 27th, and a Peregrine at Salisbury on the same day. On the Cape, 3 Common Terns had remained until the 26th (B.B.C. - D'Entremont) while Lesser Scaups were in Brookline and an Iceland Gull at Niles Pond, and a Laughing Gull in New Bedford (Dorothy Briggs). Birds of prey included an Osprey on the 22nd at Mashpee by Wilson, a Bald Eagle at Plum Island on the 27th, and we just received a report of an immature GOLDEN EAGLE observed as close as 30 feet by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hale of Rockport.

So far we have left out the wood warblers inasmuch as documenting the tardy individuals would be confusing if we didn't present them together as a family: Nov. 6th, a Tennessee Warbler at Vineyard Haven; 7th Black-throated Blue at Concord; 12th a Yellow at Ipswich; 17th Black & White at Tewksbury; 18th Black-throated Green at Rockport; 25th a Prairie at Rockport; there were 6 reports of Orange-crowned warblers with one dead one found in Carlisle, 4 Nashvilles, one Magnolia, one Chestnut-sided, one Blackpoll, 2 Pine, 11 Palm and 9 Yellowthroats being reported.

Other reports coming in for November showed at least 9 Winter Wrens, mostly seen on the North Shore. Two Indigo Buntings were late but then several species that come in fall either late in arriving or not present. Only one Pine Siskin was reported, few House Finches were reported, just 6 Fox Sparrows were reported and Lapland Longspurs were quite scarce, even at Salisbury were they normally occur in late fall.

Two other species are worth mentioning for November. The area covered by our reporters is primarily that shown in the front of the magazine, the counties making up Eastern Massachusetts. There is excellent coverage for the western half of the state and a journal already publishes these. We feel, however, that there is a number of people that enjoy seeing rare birds in any part of the state so from time to time we will mention them. On November 12 at Pelham a GRAY JAY began frequenting several feeders in one location and has been readily seen by many. We encourage everyone to freely report their finds and we have a central Clearing House with Mrs. Ruth P. Emory, 225 Belmont St., Wollaston, Mass., 02170. She would like to hear from anyone on their birds and she can supply details where to find the rarities such as the above-mentioned Gray Jay. Her phone number is 617-472-7848. The second bird, an Arctic Loon, we will comment on in the previews section.

THE BIRD OBSERVER SUMMARY FOR DECEMBER

With the arrival of December we are thinking of coming cold weather, wondering whether snow will hamper our birding or whether the arctic blasts will provide us with glimpses of boreal species. This month also means some added work for active birders who participate in the annual Christmas Censuses sponsored by the National Audubon Society. More comment will be made on these later on but as leaders of census groups begin to scout their areas toward the middle of the month some interesting birds are turned up. Then with military precision on Count day all living wild birds are tallied and often amazing results are compiled. In the past there have been two weekends in the last half of December used for censusing but this year three weekends were available including the early weekend of the 16th and 17th. A number of censuses chose the early dates in the hopes of catching some last minute stragglers in order to swell the totals. Unfortunately the weather played a double-cross that weekend. Instead of the unseasonably mild weather enjoyed the first two weeks a rip-snorting northeast storm brought cold and snow to Eastern Massachusetts on the 15th and it still snowed on the 16th. As the storm departed the wind swung around to the northwest bringing bone-shilling temperatures quite discouraging to birds and birders. Nonetheless very good results were obtained and we have the highlights of most of the reports here. Since most of the bird records were from the Christmas Censuses and fewer observers were out in the field so we will highlight the bird species for the month including the various censuses rather than advance through the month from week to week as in November, a migratory month.

Red-throated Loon:	three reports submitted although this species is regular in small numbers at various coastal points such as Rockport all month	
Red-necked Grebe:	12/3 & 9 at Cape Ann	B.B.C. Hotz and Murphy
Pied-billed Grebe:	12/10 Falmouth (3) 12/28 Jamaica Plain (2)	B.B.C. Pease Angush
Greater Shearwater:	12/27 Emerson Rocks, Plum I. (1)	Alexander
Great Cormorant:	12/23 Rockport (40)	B.B.C. Weisburg
Great Blue Heron:	12/3 Spy Pond, Arlington (9) various other reports of 1 or 2 birds	Hansen
American Bittern:	12/16 Plum Is. (1)	Berry
Snow Goose:	12/8 Cohasset (5)	Hunt
Gadwall:	12/10 Clark's Pond, Ipswich (1)	Berry
Pintail:	12/9 Plum Is. (80)	Alexander
European Widgeon:	12/1-9 Niles Pond, Gloucester	Various observers
Redhead:	12/2-10 Falmouth (6-9)	B.B.C. Moore, Pease
Canvasback:	12/2 Falmouth (150)	Moore
Barrow's Goldeneye	12/2-10 Falmouth (2)	B.B.C. Moore, Pease
Oldsquaw:	12/10 Falmouth (11)	B.B.C. Pease
Belted Kingfisher:	scarce but a small number reported from several locations	
King Eider:	12/10 Plum Is. (2) 12/27 Plum Is. (1)	Stymeist & Berry Alexander
Common Merganser:	12/11 Horn Pond, Woburn (3)	Angush
Goshawk:	12/11 Lincoln (1) several other reports of individuals	Alden
Sharp-shinned Hawk:	12/13 Upton	Alden
Cooper's Hawk:	12/19 World's End, Hingham (1 imm.) several other reports, Wellesley & Middleboro	Brown

Marsh Hawk:	12/3 Plum Is. (2)	Forster
Osprey:	12/3 Wellesley (1)	Quinlan
Pigeon Hawk:	12/6 Wollaston (1)	Brown
Ruffed Grouse:	12/22 Harwich (1)	Argues
Turkey Vulture:	12/2 Newburyport (1)	Stymeist, et al.
Virginia Rail:	12/18 Chatham (1)	Rieh
Killdeer:	12/3 Gloucester (5)	D'Entremont, et al.
Common Snipe:	12/10 Middlesex Fells (1)	Stymeist
Purple Sandpiper:	12/5 Cohasset (75)	Hubbard
White-rumped Sandpiper:	12/9 Gloucester (1)	Murphy
Long-billed Dowitcher:	12/9 Plum Is. (3)	Alexander
Glaucous Gull:	12/23 Gloucester	B.B.C. Weisburg
Iceland Gull:	12/27 Plum Is. (5)	Alexander
(Kumlien's Gull:)	several reports from north shore	
	12/27 Plum Is.	Alexander, et. al.
Black-headed Gull:	12/17 Squantum (26)	Brown & Higginbotham
Little Gull:	12/3 Cohasset (1)	Higginbotham
	12/3 Newburyport (3)	Forster
Forster's Tern:	12/3 Plum Is. (1)	Forster, et al.
Razorbill:	12/24 Roekport (1)	Leahy
Dovekie:	12/24 Roekport (hundreds)	Leahy
Black Guillemot:	12/23-27 Roekport (3)	Glancy & Angush
Common Puffin:	12/25 First Encounter Beh., Eastham	oiled bird by Bailey
Monk Parakeet:	12/8 Byfield (1)	Joyce
Screech Owl:	12/3 Lanesboro (1)	B.B.C., et al.
Snowy Owl:	one continuing at Plum Is. and another between East Boston airport and Long Is. during month	
Barred Owl:	12/2 Belmont	Butler
Long-eared Owl:	12/10 Mt. Auburn, Cambridge (1)	Stymeist
	12/10 Belmont (1)	Stymeist
Short-eared Owl:	12/27 Squantum (3)	Brown
Pileated Woodpecker:	12/10-20 Weston	Stymeist & Angush
Fish Crow:	12/29 Brookline (1) also a small number wintering at West Roxbury dump	
Winter Wren:	12/10 Middlesex Fells (4)	Stymeist
Hermit Thrush, Catbird, Brown Thrasher more scarce than in recent Decembers; Brown Creepers, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Chickadees holding their own with 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglets reported.		
Loggerhead Shrike:	12/15 Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary	Bailey
Warblers reported included Pine, Palm, and a very tardy Yellowthroat in Falmouth 12/10, B.B.C		
A few Redwinged Blackbirds, Cowbirds, and Grackles remained in protected areas		
Baltimore Oriole:	12/2 Falmouth	Moore
Dickeissel:	12/4-15 Chatham (killed flying against window)	Rieh
Small numbers in many areas were reported for Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, House Finch (150 at World's End, Hingham 12/19 - Brown); a total of 98 Pine Grosbeaks was noted, and 3 separate Pine Siskins showed that they are still scarce in our area.		
Red Crossbill:	12/10 Falmouth (30)	B.B.C.
Lark Sparrow:	12/3 Plymouth	Carmichaels

Very few Towhees were reported although one feeder in Bedford had 6. Several Field Sparrows were remaining in Braintree and several Snow Buntings were recorded although their numbers had dropped considerably.

As we mentioned before the Christmas Count period started December 16 and lasted through the end of the year. These censuses are great fun and provide some enjoyable hours of association and good birding within certain defined areas. A count area comprises a circle of 15 mile diameter with a certain center pinpointed and kept track of yearly. The results of the census are sent to the National Audubon Society and kept in file. A special edition of AMERICAN BIRDS magazine publishes the results countrywide. Many interesting trends may be noted, population reductions, invasions, rarities shared, cross-country movements charted and general wintering populations analyzed. These records are made available to various government agencies who are responsible for making legislation on game management, conservation, etc. So besides being a lot of fun, these counts serve a useful purpose and most birders take them quite seriously. If the reader is interesting in participating in the next census program then contact either Mrs. Emory whose address is contained in the November summary or any of the editors of this journal. We now present some of the highlights of the Eastern Massachusetts Christmas Counts.

Greater Boston, Dec. 16

The day began with remnants of a snow storm and ended with strong northwest winds but seabirds which had been blown close to shore remained through the afternoon off Revere Beach feeding actively. Unusual for being close to shore and being late in the year were Greater Shearwater (2), Pomarine Jaeger, 100 Kittiwakes, Dovekie. Peter Alden spotted a Harlequin Duck in Winthrop and Nancy Claflin found a very tardy and obviously hardy Common Gallinule. Various ponds contributed numbers of ducks including 25 Hooded Mergansers and 13 Common Mergansers. Other highlights included a Goshawk, a Black-headed Gull, Sereesh and Great Horned Owls, 2 Hermit Thrushes, a Northern Shrike, 6 Pine Grosbeaks, 10 Common Redpolls, 11 Siskins, 7 Fish Crows and 2 Oregon Junco's.

Buzzards Bay, Dec. 16

This count is situated in a "birdy" area and several species linger along the Bay before heading south so the workers on this census feel that well over 100 species might be recorded in favorable weather conditions. Highlighted are: 1 Double-crested Cormorant, 4 Wood Ducks, 8 Barrow's Goldeneyes, 1 Clapper Rail, 1 Black-headed Gull, 1 Western Kingbird, 1 Northern Shrike, 7 Pine Grosbeaks, 5 Red Crossbills, 5 Rufous-sided Towhees, 1 Grasshopper Sparrow (nearly incredible for winter), 27 Field Sparrows.

Quiney, Dec. 17

A very cold wind-chill factor hampered birders on this census but the birds cooperated and 98 species were recorded. 8 Ring-necked Ducks were good as were 131 Canvasbacks, a Barrow's Goldeneye, a King Eider, 14 Ruddy Ducks, 26 Common Mergansers, 115 Purple Sandpipers, 26 Black-headed Gulls, nearly 800 Bonaparte's Gulls, 25 Kittiwakes, a fine view of Barred Owl by Bob Fox and Kathleen Anderson, Shorteared Owl, a Hermit Thrush, a Northern Shrike, a Dickcissel in Beechwood, a Boreal Chickadee in Hingham, 4 Swamp Sparrows and 5 Lapland Longspurs.

Newburyport, Dec. 17

The cold wind had to be braved here also and as usual many of the birds found here in November and early December had pulled out for more southerly climes. Interesting sightings included: Red-necked Grebe, 2 Pied-billed Grebes, 66 Pintails, 5 Green-winged Teals, 4 Redheads, 1 King Eider, 3 Goshawks, 2 Virginia Rails, 1 Sora, 1 Woodcock, 2 Iceland Gulls, 2 Dickcissels, 56 Pine Grosbeaks, and a White-crowned Sparrow.

Cape Cod, Dec. 30

Traditionally the top count in the state belongs to Cape Cod and this year yielded 125 species. Many species are found here not included on other counts such as: 30 Gannets, 371 Brant, a Snow Goose, 75 American Widgeon, 24,944 Common Eiders, 3 Piping Plovers, 1 Parasitic Jaeger, 58 Razorbills, 2 Thick-billed Murres, 130 Dovekies, 1 Black Buller's, 1 Long-billed Marsh Wren, 86 Mockingbirds, 1 Orange-crowned Warbler, 4 Ipswich Sparrows, 9 Seaside Sparrows, 3 Yellowthroats and a Chipping Sparrow.

PREVIEWS

Now that January is here we look forward to seeing in the new year some of the interesting birds holding over from December. If you are interested in going out to some new places to see birds and want to know what to see then call the Voice of Audubon, 617-259-8805 for the latest information. Those interested in seabirds should travel to areas such as Plum Island for King Eider, Andrews Point, Rockport for Black Guillemots, Bass Rocks and Eastern Point, Gloucester for Thick-billed Murre and white-winged gulls. A trip to Orleans Beach on the Cape may yield a good number of Razorbills. Barrow's Goldeneyes and Harlequin Ducks are possible along the coast of Cape Ann. Three hours after high tide many Black-headed Gulls may be observed at Squantum. For wintering populations of interesting ducks one should travel to Falmouth around Sider's Pond. In the western part of the state Boreal Chickadees may be observed at Ashley Pond near Holyoke, a Whistling Swan continues on Lake Onota, Pittsfield, a Red-bellied Woodpecker visits a suet feeder in Southampton, and the Gray Jay still comes to a feeder in Pelham. In our area current rarities include a Western Tanager in Annisquam and Boreal Chickadee in Hingham. Those of you with feeders should be on the watch for interesting visitors such as Dickcissel, Pine Siskin, Pine Grosbeak, Boreal Chickadee, Oregon Junco, etc. If you want help identifying the birds visiting your feeder contact Mrs. Ruth P. Emery, 225 Belmont St., Wollaston, 02170. If you enjoy watching birds and want to contribute your findings Mrs. Emery would be glad to here from you. We feel that THE BIRD OBSERVER of Eastern Massachusetts, fills a void and provides a way to publish bird records of Eastern Massachusetts. We encourage constructive criticism as to format, your desires on bird records, and other thoughts concerning this new publication. We want to have it serve your bird interests, whether it be back-yard birding or special projects or a way of cataloging current bird records. If you wish to contribute to the magazine by means of articles, suggestions or by gathering data this would be much appreciated.



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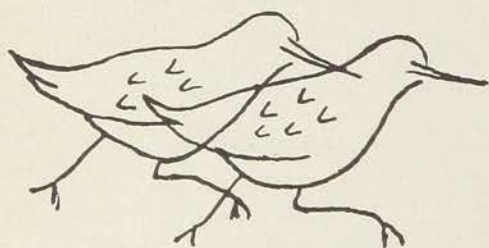
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