

# The Changing Seasons: Warm Winds

## A balmy fall

It's rare in a season to hear such unanimity from across the temperate reporting regions: from virtually all quarters comes word that warm weather ruled most of the continent north of Mexico almost through November's end, and in many regions, a marked lack of typical cold fronts meant few fallouts or concentrations of migrants over much of the season. Even from off-continent reporting areas, such as Bermuda, the paucity of cold fronts was noted as having substantially reduced the number and diversity of migrants. Despite the late arrivals and lower numbers of migrants in many regions, there was also near-consensus that the season was a very good one for vagrants, virtually everywhere.

From Alaska and the Pacific Northwest to the Rockies and Great Plains and Prairie Provinces, through eastern Canada and the northeastern states—and south through Appalachia, the Southern Great Plains, the Southern Atlantic and Gulf Coasts—the fall season was again unusually warm, with below-average precipitation over much of the continent. The combination of high temperatures and little rain led to near-drought conditions over much of the eastern two-thirds of North America, with notable exceptions. In Ontario, rains in late August and September alleviated dry conditions somewhat; light rains fell then from New York south to Virginia but did little to change bone-dry impoundments: Bombay Hook and Chincoteague refuges had very little habitat for shorebirds, while Conejohela Flats in eastern Pennsylvania produced 27 species. In the drying Upper St. Lawrence River area, mudflats were exposed; but, as in the eastern Great Lakes, the anticipated flocks of shorebirds never materialized. Editors Denault, Bannon, Aubry, and David speculate that the birds might have simply been less concentrated on migration this year. Similar conditions in New England produced excellent shorebirding on Lake Champlain, while Robert Leberman reports that “low water levels and extensive mudflats at many lakes and reservoirs [...] translated into more than the usual number of interesting shorebird sightings” in Appalachia. Florida's drought situation continued, despite showers from tropical systems.

Wisconsin reported above-average rainfall, but only from August, while to the south, the eastern prairies of the Midwest had much rain from August through mid-October. In Missouri, as elsewhere in the western parts of the Middlewestern Prairie Region, habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl dried up, but eastern Indiana had the opposite problem, with the best spots flooded out. A “deluge” hit western Tennessee in late November, but otherwise the Bob and Lucy Duncan note “unremarkable” weather in the Central Southern Region. Texas, in contrast to areas to the east, witnessed heavy rains fuelled by Pacific fronts' clashes with Gulf moisture, at least in the eastern part of the state; West Texas suffered under drought. Despite these localized rains, the drought meant poor food crops over much of the East and Texas, and editors from near and far commented that the low mast production appeared to be linked to low numbers of late-season birds in particular.

All talk of global warming aside, even northern Alaska was relatively warm and mild, especially from August until early October, which is news. “Although the norm tends to be systematic cooling and snow accumulations following a mid- to late October freeze-up, this year's freeze fell hard and fast after very mild conditions dominated the Region,” writes Thede Tobish. In British Columbia, Donald Cecile documents an unusually mild and “late, late, late” fall, with the transition to cold weather and snow coming abruptly in late November, as was true almost everywhere in the Lower 48 states. New York had its “warmest November since the 1931 Dustbowl and the first snow-free November in 122 years in Buffalo,” according to editors Paxton, Burgiel, and Cutler. Even all the way to the north of Lake Superior, Peder Svungen reports that “November weather



Part of a large influx of the species from the Midwest through western New York and Pennsylvania, these Wood Storks made Clyde, New York their fishing ground in late August and September. Photograph by Angus Wilson.

seemed like September!”—and the same news comes from Rudolf Koes and Peter Taylor in the Prairie Provinces, Ron Martin in the Northern Great Plains, Brandon Percival and Van Truan in the Mountain West, and David Trochlell, who adds that August was Idaho's warmest and Montana's fourth warmest. Ken Brock notes that November was Kansas City's fourth warmest; Chicago's daytime high temperatures in November averaged seven degrees Fahrenheit above normal. New Mexico and Arizona also found their falls very mild, with “winter's” arrival also largely post-Thanksgiving Day.

Out West, at least south of the Canadian border, the weather situation resisted neat characterization, as is often the case. “Few observers were willing to generalize about the weather or to speculate about its possible relation to avian distribution and abundance this fall,” writes Ted Floyd in the Great Basin. Editors Mlodinow, Tweit, and Contreras describe a warm and very dry early season in Oregon and eastern Washington, with more typical wet weather arriving in November, in line with the rest of the continent, but average weather in western Washington. The lack of either twin, El Niño nor La Niña, off California presumably means that the weather was more or less “normal” there as well, while in Hawai'i, Bob Pyle and Peter Donaldson send word that the long drought was finally broken by heavy rains on several islands, much-needed relief.

## Fronts

Regional editors in the East provided good detail on the cold fronts that crossed their paths; given the mild weather and scarcity of cold fronts, birds in the eastern and central parts of the continent tended to linger north later than usual but also to concentrate themselves in migratory passages on what northerly winds were available. There were too many reports of record-late departures to cite here, but in some areas, such as the Central Southern Region, the late arrival of a respectable cold front produced a large number of *record-early arrival dates*. In general, those birders north of the Mason-Dixon line's latitude saw birds moving roughly on schedule, while those from the Carolinas, southern Appalachia, and the Southern Great Plains southward twiddled their thumbs longer than normal while waiting on the short-distance migrants in particular. In the

Southern Great Plains, Joe Grzybowski attests, “Some observers wondered when the sparrows would be arriving” (dittoed by the Duncans in the northern Gulf of Mexico). We have only to look north to find the birds: “The placid conditions allowed a gradual retreat of most migrants, while giving lingerers little trouble surviving into December,” note Taylor and Koes, on the same note, Margaret Bain in Ontario comments on the numerous lingering warblers and vireos in that province. Brock offers “the presence of 13 warbler species in Indiana’s Migrant Trap 13 October” as an index of the late fall, and Walter Ellison and Nancy Martin write that the “mild weather also delayed the movement of temperature-responsive migrants like waterfowl.”

While August was warm over most of the continent, and cool fronts of any consequence negligible, a Canadian cool front passing over the East Coast coincided with the calamities of 11 September, and birders reluctantly moved from their local migrant hotspots to the television set, the beginning of long efforts to understand what had happened in the human world. One wonders what the tens of thousands of Broad-winged Hawks—in the synchronous flights that followed on 15 September across New England, Pennsylvania, and New York—saw from their heights as they moved toward winter quarters. On the Gulf Coast, the first strong cold front of the season arrived 23-24 September, bringing a long-awaited push of belated Gulf migrants but also a small numbers birds that typically arrive later in October. Four days later, on 28 September, an unusually concentrated wave of Canada Geese, jaegers, and thrushes passed through upstate New York, but, as elsewhere, record-early dates were established, in this case for Brant and Harlequin Duck.

October began to feel more like autumn, though cold fronts were still few. A strong front 6-7 October worked wonders for banders from Fort Morgan, Alabama to Bluff Point, Connecticut, where 1300 warblers of 16 species were tallied. A moderate frontal passage 22-24 October grounded flocks of Brant in interior New England, jaegers and Sabine’s Gulls in the Great Lakes, and brought numerous waterfowl into southern Louisiana, as if on cue for the Louisiana Ornithological Society’s convention. A strong front passed just a few days later in the Midwest and East, 26-28+ October, putting down sea ducks in the interior (though not Appalachia) and an Ancient Murrelet past Miller Beach, Indiana, and finally giving larger raptors the means to move en masse. On 28 October, the sea watch at Avalon, New Jersey counted over 13,000 Double-crested Cormorants and 50,000 scoters, while owl-banders at Cape Charles and Cape May filled their nets with Northern Saw-whet Owls (in what was supposed *not* to be a flight year for the species).

In contrast to the eastern editors’ correlation of frontal passage with the appearance of particular birds, central and northern California’s editors report “a very solid September with fine ‘vagrant’ weather (high overcast and not much wind)” that “dissipated into a rather ordinary October-November.” It would seem that whatever role “weather” plays in bringing eastern birds into California (if any!), the mechanism there could be quite different from those thought to obtain for western birds in the East. It is likewise difficult to countenance a cause for southeastern Oregon’s sudden bonanza of eastern warblers (greater observer effort in a “good” year?), but we can certainly appreciate the work that went into that Region’s total of 26 warbler species, a seasonal high mark for the Pacific Northwest.

### Tropical systems

In October, Belize was hit by one of the worst hurricanes in its recorded history, *Iris*. With winds gusting to 185 mph, it hit the south of the country 8 October, leaving great tracts of primary rainforest destroyed and forest birds displaced and disoriented; read Lee Jones’s column for more details. Elsewhere, effects of tropical storms were rather limited to

the corners of the Atlantic coasts and offshore islands. Tropical Storm *Gabrielle* hit the central Gulf coast of Florida 14 September, crossing over to the Atlantic in under a day. Small numbers of coastal species such as Magnificent Frigatebirds were seen inland, and phalaropes and terns, including large numbers of Bridled and Sooty, were counted along the Atlantic coast. During the same time, a mix of Pomarine and Parasitic Jaegers was noted off Cape Saint Francis, Newfoundland after Hurricane *Erin* passed offshore 15 September.

Though no birds were seen entrained in the storm, Hurricane *Karen* hit Bermuda 11-12 October and damaged vegetation, both with high winds and salt spray. In the Bahamas, Hurricane *Michelle* passed directly over New Providence 5 November and did more damage to trees; during its passage east of Florida the next day, the storm pushed dozens of Cory’s and a few Audubon’s Shearwaters and a Brown Booby into Florida’s Atlantic coast. The unpredictable *Olga*, meandering between the Bahamas and Bermuda in late November, was credited with bringing an American Pipit to Middle Caicos 28 November. Hurricane *Juliette* moved over Baja California Sur in late September and into the Gulf of California in early October; no displacement of seabirds was noted, but heavy rains spurred late-season breeding by some species.

### Birds north: dispersals and reversals

It had been a good long time—in some places almost 50 years—since young Wood Storks staged a late-summer flight into the Midwest, southern Canada, and the Northeast. The first showed up 5 August in Lombard, near Chicago, Illinois, and remained for 20 days, starring in the *Chicago-Tribune*. Four days later, three appeared at Pelee Island, Ontario, followed quickly by singles near Mosiertown and Littlestown, Pennsylvania, 12-31 August and mid-August to 3 September, respectively. The motherlode hit Clyde, in upstate New York, about 15 August where 16 stayed for three weeks. Even Québec was the recipient of a stork: way, way out at Bonaventure 3-5 September, the province’s second. The last stork appeared near Cleveland 9 September, only the fourth Ohio record.

It’s probably fruitless to speculate on the origin of these storks. The species nests in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, as well as in coastal Mexico south through tropical South America and larger Greater Antilles. It has usually been assumed that wanderers in the East are from the eastern states, western vagrants from Mexico or perhaps a bit farther south. Since at least the 1970s, the sharp decline in records of the species out of range in most of the East has been attributed to the crash in Florida’s population, now perhaps a seventh of its 1930s numbers. No good population data are available for other parts of the species’s range in Central America, much less a sense of how the weather south of the U. S. border might affect the species. It seems odd that the Atlantic coast states and Gulf coast states saw *nothing* of this stork flight (other than an April report of 10-12 birds from Virginia); the birds were found almost entirely northeast to northwest of the nearest nesters (South Carolina) and mostly near the shores of Lakes Erie, Michigan, or Ontario. In the past, it has sometimes been plausible to tie eastern vagrants to Florida’s rainy season (in foraging they exploit drying ponds); perhaps this latest wave came from the healthier South Carolina and Georgia rookeries or from Tennessee, where 1215 were counted.

There were a few other species whose post-nesting dispersals brought them northward in notable numbers this season, and there were plenty of warm fronts and southerly winds to bring birds north in August and early September. A connection between the storks’ arrival and the five Great White Herons found along the East Coast between Long Island and Maryland seems implausible: the timing of the movements differed, the species rely on different habitats, and there were no other Florida species on the move (a few Georgia Limpkins notwithstanding) to suggest a great

exodus. Single Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at Jug Bay, Maryland and Andrews Island, Georgia were the only members of the species reported well out of range this season, but Bill Pranty reports that the Florida population was unusually prolific and widespread this year.

Continuing the past summer's trend, Mississippi Kites wandered around north of normal range, into the mid-Atlantic and Midwest, where not usually autumn birds, and persisted in Nevada. A Swallow-tailed Kite at Shelby, Indiana was the state's sixth modern record; the hawk watch at Smith Point, Texas recorded 74 this season, far more than usual. A White-tailed Hawk in Louisiana was among the many attestations of this state's potential for birds from the Tamaulipan biotic province. Carolina Wren continued to make inroads, into Nova Scotia and Québec, and other southerners drifting north were single Black Vultures in Minnesota (that state's first) and Nova Scotia, a Least Tern in Michigan, and a Brown-headed Nuthatch in Ohio. In keeping with recent trends, dispersing "southern" herons continued to move farther north, in larger numbers, and to remain longer—Great Egrets were almost common locally this fall in British Columbia, Québec, and Nova Scotia. Out West, Reddish Egrets are wandering a great deal recently: birds in western Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado would have been considered extraordinary only a few years ago. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons made it to New Mexico and Washington, where quite rare.

Southerly species were scarce out of range on migration (or in reverse migration) in the East, and part of the problem may have been the position of the jet stream, which, in addition to bringing few cold fronts down the traditional track, robbed the Atlantic Provinces of southwesterly winds during the September and early October vagrant season, as Bruce Mactavish suggests. Nevertheless, other staple wanderers were found. An immature Purple Gallinule arrived at L'Ancienne-Lorette, Québec 18 November, part of a modest pattern at this time of year; the only other one out of range this season was in Maryland, its first in 13 years. Summer Tanager may be showing signs of a shift in the frequency of vagrancy: one in Québec and several in Manitoba and the Atlantic Provinces, plus a rush of records in California, Oregon, and Washington, continued an upward trend. One in Arizona was identified as a probable nominate (eastern) bird, it's worthwhile trying to key out late or vagrant Summer Tanagers to refine our knowledge of how the *rubra* and *cooperi* subspecies move.

What would the fall report be without tropical tyrant flycatchers? Fork-tailed Flycatchers put in appearances in New Brunswick, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, and British Columbia, while a Couch's Kingbird at Plum Island, Massachusetts made for a first state record, one of very few in the East. A calling Tropical Kingbird at Pea Island, North Carolina was that state's second, among several Tropical/Couch's types seen on the Outer Banks this fall; another Tropical/Couch's was at Dauphin Island, Alabama, a state fifth. Single Gray Kingbirds were notable were at Quintana, Texas and at Point Pelee, and Texans had a Thick-billed Kingbird in the Panhandle. A Cassin's Kingbird in Oregon was a state second—and its first in over 65 years. While we're on vagrants and visitors whose ranges lie primarily in the tropics or subtropics, we should mention the two Green-breasted Mangos in Texas, the Rufous-backed Robin in southern California, both Blue-throated and Magnificent Hummingbirds in Colorado, nesting Rufous-capped Warblers and possibly nesting Short-tailed Hawks in Arizona, the cooperative Western Spindalis at Cape Florida, and the Blue Mockingbird at Weslaco, Texas.

Southern seabirds far north of range were Laughing Gull and Wilson's Storm-Petrel off Washington (state third and second); Yellow-nosed Albatross off Rhode Island, a possible state first; Sooty Tern just offshore of Marin County, California (northeasternmost Pacific record); Shy Albatross and Black-vented Shearwater off Oregon (both seconds); and

Masked Booby reported 24 August in New Jersey, a far piece from usual Gulf Stream habitat—indeed there are no confirmed records north of the Carolinas.

## Birds south: irruptives and boreal migrants

Into the eastern and central United States and most of southern Canada, the great boreal forest belt let forth a fine flight of its birds late in the season, chief among them Pine Grosbeaks, Bohemian Waxwings, White-winged Crossbills, Common Redpolls, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and Black-capped Chickadees, with lesser numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches and Red Crossbills. Most of the far-northern species reached only the states and provinces either side of the U.S.-Canada border (the waxwings made northwestern Pennsylvania), but there were outliers among the other species: White-winged Crossbills to Bermuda, Kentucky, and southern Virginia, single Purple Finches to Texas and New Mexico, and Common Redpolls south to Oregon, Nevada, Nebraska, Missouri, and North Carolina. Evening Grosbeaks continued as just a shadow of their former (1960s to mid-1980s) numbers in the East.

Among these irruptors, the real stories were the grosbeaks and chickadees. Pine Grosbeaks were in numbers not seen for almost 30 years in the eastern Great Lakes: counts such as 80 around Buffalo were staggering for younger birders, though the species never made it south to Pennsylvania or past the central Hudson Valley. Farther east, small flocks roamed New England, with outliers to Connecticut, Cape Cod, and Nantucket. In the Atlantic provinces, Minnesota, New England, New York, and Ontario, the chickadees moved in great waves beginning in early September, when Thunder Bay researchers saw hundreds daily, through late September, when one observer counted as many as 500 in two minutes streaming past his northeastern New Brunswick home! The Kaiser-Manitou banding station near Rochester, New York banded 380 on 13 October alone!

Most vole-eaters stayed up north, but Snowy Owls staged a strong flight (on par with those of 1987 and 1991) into the Midwest and East, as far south as Fort Fisher, North Carolina; a substantial proportion of the birds in Minnesota and Ontario were found injured, starving, or dead. Long-eared Owls were captured in record-high numbers at Cape May on the marvelous flight night of 28 October. Northern Shrikes, Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Goshawks, and Gyrfalcons stayed within typical wintering range.

With the increase of birding in the continent's interior, particularly around lakes, the flood of information on southbound taiga- and tundra-zone nesters—on shorebirds, but also on jaegers, Sabine's, Little, and many other gulls, loons and grebes, scoters and other seaducks (Harlequin Duck: Pennsylvania, Texas, and Nebraska got lucky), and on locally scarce (Harris's Sparrow) or secretive (Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow) passerines—has been truly impressive. Even a few very low-density obligate migrants, such as Northern Wheatear, are detected inland, as at Great Meadows, New Jersey; coastal individuals reached southern California and southern Louisiana this season.

## Birds east: a feast

In contrast to the spring, in which few western birds show up well out of range in the East, the autumn is a time for birders to scramble in a search for regular vagrants (Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Western Kingbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Lark Sparrow, Swainson's Hawk et al.) but especially those off-course migrants from the Far West. This year's search was wildly successful, by all counts.

Leading the list were clearly Florida's Surf-bird at Sanibel Island and New Jersey's Pacific Golden-Plover in Salem County, both birds scarcely known in the East. It's tempting to see a faint connection between these and other extralimitals: a Pacific Golden-Plover reported at Bowdoin

N WR. in Montana would be a state first, the Yukon found its first-in-fall Pacifics, while British Columbia found its first Surf-bird *ever* for the interior (But the distance between Montana and New Jersey is considerable.) A Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Bermuda, somewhat farther traveled, fit an established pattern of juveniles dispersing across the continent and beyond in the autumn. (All of these birds probably flew as far south as they did east, but not by much!) Not altogether unexpected, but mighty rare, was a Flammulated Owl on a condominium balcony in Florida at Navarre Beach; the state's other record was from St. Petersburg. Given recent records from offshore Gulf oil rigs (Texas had another this fall), the states north of Florida should be alert for vagrant Flams.

In a league with these records, North Carolinians found a Sprague's Pipit, Ontarians a Virginia's Warbler and a Lewis's Woodpecker (another was in Missouri), and Pennsylvanians a Black-throated Gray Warbler, while Wisconsin enjoyed a Brambling and a probable Slaty-backed Gull, the latter potentially a first for the state, Alabama a Chestnut-collared Longspur (a state first), and Michigan, Louisiana, and Maine each a Sage Thrasher. Single Ancient Murrelets were reported in Indiana and Michigan, a long way from home but part of a weak pattern of late-autumn dispersal across the Great Lakes and eastward.

More precedent provided context for the Black Brant at Chicago, Sprague's Pipit in Alabama, Black-throated Sparrow in Minnesota, Audubon's Warbler in New Hampshire, two White-faced Ibis in Florida, Rock Wrens in Michigan and Louisiana, Western Grebes in Tennessee and North Carolina, a Townsend's Solitaire in Indiana (and others elsewhere), Green-tailed Towhee in Illinois, Spotted Towhee and Ferruginous Hawk in Louisiana, Bronzed Cowbirds in western Florida, and Bullock's Oriole in Québec. The Florida Heermann's Gull continues to hang on there; another one was about as far away as it could be in the mainland United States at Ketchikan, Alaska 28 August (without El Niño!).

The distribution of several essentially western birds appears to be changing in the East. Cave Swallows now nest far enough east (to Louisiana) that one might consider them a "southern" rather than a western vagrant to the East, where there were again a number this year, as well as in Kansas. One migrant remarked upon as scarce this season, as back to 1996, was Wilson's Phalarope; the species was uncommon a generation ago in the East but was regular in modest numbers in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Elegant Tern might also be a species in flux. Reports of Elegants out of range have always made me nervous, rather like those Black-tailed Gulls in the East. On one shoulder, the angel of acceptance encourages—"hey, after all, they're recorded regularly in the Caribbean off Costa Rica, as vagrants to European countries, and how about those recent southwestern records?" And: "Hey, Ancient and Long-billed Murrelets show up in the East; why not Pacific gulls and terns?" But then the devil of doubt, on the other shoulder, weighs in: "Oh, yeah, then why aren't there more Salton Sea records of Elegant Tern? It's not as though the Salton Sea is underbirded...." And: "What about the southernmost 'Cayenne' Terns that are larger and longer-billed than northern 'Cayenne' Terns? How easy are they to distinguish from Elegant Terns?" After the previous season's birds in Arizona and New Mexico, this fall saw another set of reports of out-of-range Elegants. Two of these were at East Beach 4-18 September, a third record of the species for Texas. Having looked at photographs of these birds posted on the Internet, I think that one bird looked certainly like an Elegant, the other more like a Cayenne Tern, the *eurygnatha* subspecies of Sandwich Tern. About the same time, Brian Patteson and I found an Elegant Tern among a large number of Sandwich Terns at Chincoteague on 5 September, a bird that remained at least two more days. The bird was very near the site of Claudia Wilds's 10 June 1985 record (*A. B.* 39: 897), the first Atlantic Coast record.

It is the subsequent Florida story that makes one wary: in summer 2001 at Fort De Soto, on the Gulf Coast, an Elegant was seen copulating with a Sandwich Tern (*N. A. B.* 55: 382), and this autumn at least *three* Elegants were present here, but observers are uncertain of their parentage. A juvenile was seen groveling to an adult 17 August, whereas a subadult was present 21-22 September, with an adult present 24 September. Pranty reports now that an "obvious hatch-year Elegant x Sandwich Tern hybrid was photographed at Cortez Beach" in Manatee County on 9 October Uh-oh. As with the Kelp Gulls hybridizing with Herring Gulls on islands off the coast of Louisiana, the out-of-range Elegant in Florida appears to be in a catch-as-catch-can situation, with the result that we'll need to be even more cautious when reporting these birds out of range than before.

Long a staple of eastern vagrant-seasons, flycatchers from the West are expected visitors, but a Hammond's Flycatcher on Long Island 26-27 October was genuinely rare, one of few satisfactorily documented east of the Mississippi. More regular but nowhere sneezed at, single Vermilion Flycatchers made it to Wisconsin, Maryland, Ohio, western Florida, and Québec. New Brunswick's Ash-throated Flycatcher at Jemseg and Manitoba's first at Grosse Isle were outliers in a flight of this species toward the East, one that included five in New England, three in the Middle Atlantic, about six in the Hudson-Delaware Region, two in Alabama, and one in western Florida.

And then there are the rising stars from the West, the hummingbirds, no longer a shock but always a pleasure. Rufous Hummingbirds still lead the pack by a sizable margin, with scores of them reported in the East and individuals north to Saint-Prime, Québec, Old Orchard Beach, Maine, and Liscomb, Nova Scotia. Are these birds using feeders throughout their journeys? You betcha; one captured at Ortonville, Michigan in October had been banded by Susan Campbell in December 2000 near Hendersonville, North Carolina. Black-chinned Hummingbirds, known for a good while as lower-density vagrants to the Deep South, pushed the envelope farther north, with records in New Jersey and Virginia, 26-29 October, this season. Meanwhile, in the Deep South, where 10 hummingbird species might be recorded in a season, the rare become regular and ultra-rare visitors are putting in appearances—viz., North Carolina's first Broad-billed *and* Broad-tailed Hummingbirds in October. Two Broad-billed Hummingbirds made it to Louisiana, one to Oregon, and Texas had a bunch, while two Calliopes, not previously recorded north of Cape May in the East, made it to New York City 17 November, where they held court at Fort Tryon for several weeks. Even Costa's Hummingbirds sallied forth one continued near Fort Davis, Texas, while singles in Nebraska and Montana were both unprecedented.

Some columbids get the blood racing: the single Band-tailed Pigeons in Minnesota and Ontario would be among those. White-winged Doves and Eurasian Collared-Doves, on the other hand, are hard to avoid lately, even many hundreds of miles from core breeding range; and Inca Doves continue to move north and slightly east as well, having now crossed the Mississippi River in small numbers, into Mississippi. It's important to keep a watch on all of these situations, particularly given persistent reports of confusion between "Ringed Turtle-Doves" (a dove-fancier's form) and bonafide Eurasian Collared-Doves.

The Davis Mountains of Texas continue to produce records of birds whose ranges lie farther west and/or south: observers there this season saw a Buff-breasted Flycatcher (feeding a young Gray Flycatcher<sup>1?</sup>), a Clark's Nutcracker, and a Flame-colored Tanager. Not too far away in El Paso, the state's sixth Violet-crowned Hummingbird visited a feeder

### **Birds west: nearly everything but Kirtland's Warbler**

Birds out of range in the West showed breathtaking diversity this season, often true in fall, and though warblers dominated the news, virtually all

other Neotropical migrants put in appearances, most of them annual visitors. Single Scarlet Tanagers brightened Idaho (first record), Nevada (few records), and Arizona (~20 records), as well as California, which has over 100 records. Other headliners were single Glossy Ibis in Arizona and New Mexico; Black-throated Blue Warbler, Brown Thrasher, Purple Martin, and Ruddy Duck in Alaska; Upland Sandpiper and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher on the Farallones; Common Grackle in Washington; Philadelphia Vireo in Utah; White-eyed Vireo and Eastern Phoebe in Nevada; Wood Thrush, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, and Baltimore Oriole in New Mexico; a possible Eastern Wood-Pewee in Arizona; Whip-poor-will and Yellow-billed Cuckoo in British Columbia; Orchard Oriole and Chestnut-collared Longspur in Oregon; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in Idaho; and a Prairie Warbler at Minot, North Dakota. Some western birds shock western birders by moving even farther west: the Elf Owl near Los Angeles, Rufous-crowned Sparrow on Southeast Farallon Island, and Cassin's Sparrow on San Clemente Island are the season's exemplars. The prizes for real reverse migration, though, might have to go to the single Least and "Western" Flycatchers out on St. Lawrence Island this fall, or to the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher at Fairbanks.

Every autumn, what must be very large numbers of "eastern" warblers move westward, with the bulk of these discovered on California shores and in interior "vagrant traps." The causes for this movement are not known, but prevailing wind patterns may play a supporting role, as in spring. Certainly, the absence of westerly and northwesterly winds for long periods in the East early this past fall could have resulted in more passerines reaching western locations. But much of the thinking lately

focuses on vagrants' variable numbers as indices of population changes. California reports a significant (up to 40%) increase in records of eastern warblers over last fall, nearly as good as 1999's numbers. A part of this increase may be thanks to birders in interior valleys, who are stepping up efforts and finding remarkable numbers and variety of migrant warblers (15 eastern warbler species in interior northern California alone this season!), but the increase might also indicate upward trends in the populations of certain species.

Birders away from the Golden State are also finding eastern warblers in some variety and even numbers. The Pacific Northwest certainly did its share this season, notably southeastern Oregon, but western birders elsewhere turned in an impressive array of strays as well, a few of them not recorded in California. As has been the case, California had more individual vagrant warblers (1003) than the rest of the West combined (396), and though one concedes that California had probably ten- or twenty-fold the birding coverage of the rest of the West (and tracks more species as "vagrants" than some other states), there is little doubt that the geography of that state serves to concentrate off-course eastern migrants like nowhere else, despite the greater distance of the state from eastern migratory pathways. Roberson, Terrill, Ryan, Rogers, and Glover tally 38 warbler species for the Middle Pacific Coast's season, while in southern California, 40 warbler species were found.

No striking patterns emerge in the timing of interior records versus coastal records, and an unsystematic attempt to correlate wind flow patterns and frontal passages with warbler arrivals in coastal California was not immediately productive; but there are a few questions that arise in

**Table 1: Some extralimital warblers reported in western states and provinces, August-November 2001.**

State/Province	BC	AB	SK	WA	OR	n. CA	s. CA	UT	NV	AZ	NM	CO	WY	MT	ID
<b>Species</b>															
Blue-winged Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Golden-winged Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Tennessee Warbler	2	—	—	1	4	42	33	0	1	2	3	6	0	2	2
Northern Parula	0	1	0	0	2	18	13	0	0	9	1	11	0	1	1
Chestnut-sided Warbler	0	4	0	1	1	82	25	3	2	4	2	2	0	1	6
Magnolia Warbler	0	1	0	1	0	30	17	0	0	0	2	4	1	0	0
Cape May Warbler	0	1	0	0	2	6	2	0	1?	0	1	0	0	0	1
Black-throated Blue Warbler	0	3	1	0	3	17	17	1	1	3	6	10	0	1	1
Black-throated Green Warbler	—	0	0	0	0	6	6	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Blackburnian Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	16	14	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
Yellow-throated Warbler	0	0	1	0	0	1*	1†	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pine Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	0	0	1	2	3	0	0	0
Prairie Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	20	7	1	0	0	1?	4	0	0	0
Palm Warbler	—	—	0	~15	10+	123+	54+	0	3	0	4	5	1	0	1
Bay-breasted Warbler	0	0	0	0	1	7	3	0	1?	0	0	2	0	0	1
Blackpoll Warbler	2	0	0	sp.	3	86	42	0	5	1	0	10	1	0	4
Black-and-white Warbler	1	0	0	0	7	34	44	1	3	6	5	13	3	0	1
American Redstart	—	0	0	—	—	63	~50	3	9	5	11	18	0	—	—
Prothonotary Warbler	1	0	0	0	1	5	5	0	2-3	1	0	4	0	0	0
Worm-eating Warbler	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0
Swainson's Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Ovenbird	—	0	0	0	0	8	9	0	1-2	2	4	12	0	0	0
Northern Waterthrush	—	0	0	—	—	39	22	4	12	15	14	5	0	—	—
Louisiana Waterthrush	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Kentucky Warbler	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Connecticut Warbler	1	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Mourning Warbler	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Hooded Warbler	0	2	0	0	0	6	4	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	0
Canada Warbler	—	0	0	0	1	3	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>~19</b>	<b>37+</b>	<b>620+</b>	<b>383+</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>39+</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>19</b>

KEY: sp. = "Baypoll" (Blackpoll/Bay-breasted Warbler); \* = *albitora*; † = *dominicana*; — = species not tallied. The Dakotas, Kansas, Nebraska, Baja California, Alaska, and western Texas also had eastern vagrants, but a lack of space prohibits their inclusion here.

looking at the raw record (Table 1). The near-absence of early migrants such as Yellow-throated, Swainson's, and Cerulean Warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush stands out. One doubts that such birds are overlooked, as has been suggested back East, where few go warbling during the wilting heat of July and early August—and when few cold fronts ground migrating passerines. Is there some aspect of late summer weather that is poor for transporting birds westward? California had an *albilara* Yellow-throated at Point Reyes and an unexpected *dominica* in San Diego County, there were no western Ceruleans, not unusual, and the only Louisiana Waterthrush and Swainson's Warbler were in Arizona and New Mexico, respectively. Why is that?

Does it seem remarkable that Chestnut-sided Warblers were so numerous across the West, including Baja, this year? Their numbers (about 132) exceeded those of Black-and-white Warbler (118) and nearly reached those of Blackpoll (154) and American Redstart (159). Is it noteworthy that Tennessee Warblers (98) almost outnumbered Northern Waterthrushes (111)? In southern California, Tennessees were way up, and one lost bird even showed up at Gambell! There is such continuity in records-keeping in California that these data beg to be compared to the impressions of long-time observers back East, even if autumn is no auspicious season for hazarding guesses about birds' populations. Many East Coast regional reports this season suggested a continued decline in Cape May, Bay-breasted, and Tennessee Warblers, the "spruce budworm" clan, and I tend to concur from my limited standpoint, particularly in recent autumns with Cape May Warbler, which could occasionally be counted in the low hundreds in southeastern Virginia 15 years ago, but also with Tennessee and Bay-breasted, which featured prominently in the mid-Atlantic coastal flights of the late 1970s through the 1980s. That New Englanders found 49 Orange-crowned Warblers this fall, more than *double* their tally of Tennessee Warblers, formerly a very common migrant here, dovetails with my impression of its coastal scarcity farther south.

Appalachian banding stations, however, sent mixed signals on Tennessee Warbler. A flight of 1000+ at Roan Mountain, Tennessee on 6 September and a record-high banding total of 806 at Three Rivers Migration Observatory would seem to betoken a strong flight of the species; but the nearby Appalachian Front Migration Observatory's total of 305 was near average, and in Pennsylvania, Powdermill Nature Reserve's tally was about 75% below average. The total of 33 Tennessee Warblers in southern California was "more than triple last fall's total for a species that has declined in recent years as a vagrant to California." So perhaps it was a good year for a species that is otherwise experiencing a decline, noticed most on the eastern periphery of its migrational path.

No such mixed signals for Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers: Kaiser-Manitou banded only seven Cape Mays and nine Bay-breasteds this season, very low numbers again. At Appalachian stations, captures of Cape Mays were down 70-90% and of Bay-breasteds down 33-43%, compared to their own most recent ten-year averages. The increasing birding and banding activity across some western states and provinces might lend an impression of increasing vagrants: Idaho tallied its second Cape May and fourth Bay-breasted Warblers this year, Oregon its eleventh Bay-breasted and thirteenth and fourteenth Cape Mays. Most would argue that one has to look to coastal California, where observer effort is more even and the history of vagrant-hunting much longer, to perceive any trend in these birds' numbers. Kimball Garrett and Guy McCaskie confirm that Cape May Warbler is "among the rarest eastern warbler strays in recent years"; I could only find eight records for all of California this past fall, whereas Bay-breasteds made a "good showing," with ten in California, but numbers here have been higher. The decline in these species seems confirmed from all quarters.

From New England: "over the past decade, Magnolia and Black-throat-

ed Green Warblers have become the most frequently encountered of mid-fall migrants," and both appear to have increased in the mid-Atlantic states as well, though Northern Parula, Palm Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Black-and-white Warbler, and American Redstart are still more numerous in mid-fall. Why then do Arizona's editors find that Black-throated Green "has decreased dramatically in the past 20 years" in that state? And why is it relatively scarce in California as well? Northern California's editorial team calculates that over 90% of the warblers found there are "of northeastern origin, with the others from the Southeast (6%) or Southwest (2%)," so one might expect more Black-throated Greens to vagrate out West. There are those observers out there who have been thinking about these things for a long time—*North American Birds* would love to publish a summary article on such trend.

### European birds (Birds west, Part II)

Relatively few species visit our shores from Europe in the autumn, probably owing to the prevailing westerlies in the northeastern quadrant of North America. This year, however, had a fair number of east-wind days up north. A Common Chaffinch in Nova Scotia was thought to have been "wild"—the European easterlies blew quite a few vagrants into Iceland this September/October, chaffinches among them, and Nova Scotia is within reach of a hardy chaffinch. A Common Ringed Plover in Newfoundland, though likely not a nominate (European) bird, was a remarkable record in several respects: the bird is not easy to pick out amongst abundant Semipalmateds; it is hardly known from the province (one previous record); but it nests on Baffin Island, not alarmingly far away. White-faced Storm-Petrel, an enigmatic visitor from the eastern North Atlantic, bounced by us in good numbers (8+) off the Atlantic coast from Virginia to New England, mixed in with large numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrels. In a season that began quietly for northern gulls south of range, a report of a Common Gull (the nominate form of Mew Gull) from Cameron Parish, Louisiana was not anticipated—probably the most southerly record of the taxon on the continent if confirmed. There was no particular pattern of movement apparent for Common Gull, though a first-winter bird was found at Montréal 18 November.

### Asian vagrants (Birds east, Part II)

Some birds surely come to their point of discovery from the nearest population: the *japonicus* American Pipits that made it to southern California were coming from northeastern Asia; and the same must be true of California's Common Greenshank, the first known south of Alaska, and its one-day Wood Sandpiper. The first Eurasian Hobby record for the Lower 48 states came at Seattle on 20 October; another Hobby showed up 21 September on Shemya, surely from Siberia. A Streaked Shearwater at Monterey Bay crossed a fair bit of ocean to get there from the other side of the International Date Line, while the Long-billed Murrelets recorded south to Santa Cruz County, California came from the far northwestern North Pacific. Other obvious Asian-origin vagrants were out on St Lawrence Island—Sky Lark, Siberian Accentor, Little Bunting—and Shemya, which had visits from Fork-tailed Swift, Common House-Martin, and Eurasian Kestrel. The Smew at Vancouver Island (a seventh British Columbia record) probably came over from the nearest nesting areas in Siberia, too. But what about the Red-necked Stint in Massachusetts or the many Curlew Sandpipers scattered through continent? Are they coming over from northeastern Asia, or are they coming from the European side of Eurasia? Perhaps a bit of both.

### Just plain lost

A Greater Shearwater in Monterey Bay was in the wrong ocean altogether; presumably it began its northward migration mispositioned in the

Pacific off the west coast of South America, rather than in the South Atlantic. Records of this sort are extreme, but this was California's *third* Greater Shearwater, and most families of tubenoses show phenomenal propensity for vagrancy. The small black-and-white shearwater seen on northern Lake Champlain 24 August (no hurricane) and the Manx Shearwater found dead two days later on the Ottawa River provided lesser cases in point. These birds must have come from the Gulf of St. Lawrence down the St. Lawrence River (not far from Lake Champlain at Montréal), believed to be the conduit for Québec's interior records of the Manx Shearwater.

Likewise way off course in temporal terms was the Eastern Kingbird at Saint-Antoine-de-Lavaltrie, Québec on 30 November. The bird should have been plucking fruit in the Amazon basin by that date! Silent *Myiodynastes* flycatchers were in Miami and Gulf Breeze, Florida; hard to know where they were coming from without knowing what they were—Florida's three records of the genus all refer to Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher, of which Alabama recorded (banded) its third this year, at Fort Morgan, also in September. It's tempting to see a flight of Sulphur-bellieds in these records, but angels aren't treading there.

## Thrush flights

One of the genuine pleasures of being on this earth is listening to the flights of thrushes pass overhead at night in the East. In Berks County, Pennsylvania, peak nights were on the September fronts of the 16th-17th (250 each Wood and Swainson's), 23rd (350 Swainson's), and 28th (1000 Swainson's). The 22nd-23rd was also good on Kennesaw Mountain (78 Veery, 27 Gray-cheeked, 64 Wood) and Marietta, Georgia (712 Swainson's). During the same time window, Pranty reports "perhaps the best thrush flight ever reported in Florida": at Weeki Wachee, one observer listened to "hundreds" of Swainson's going over on the 21st and as many as 1500 on the 26th (nearly tenfold Florida's previous high count) If you haven't learned to identify the thrushes' nocturnal flight-call notes, take a look at the CD-ROM authored by Bill Evans and Michael O'Brien (<http://www.oldbird.org>). This resource is certain to become a foundational tool for the revolutionary study of nocturnal migrants; anyone with an interest in bird identification and bird migration should look into it.

## The finer points: are we paying more attention?

In recent "Changing Seasons" columns, Steve Dinsmore, Tony Leukering, and Michael Patten implored readers to attend to identifiable subspecies. It is striking how many regional reports for this past season feature vagrant subspecies, a relatively recent development in many of these reports. Some are feeder birds that observers have monitored closely for decades—Oregon Juncos in the East or Slate-colored Juncos in the West—but other subspecies have been less well tracked since mid-century, among them the various types of Fox and White-crowned Sparrows. In Massachusetts, one of the western races of Fox Sparrow was at Bolton Flats 28 October, while a Slate-colored Fox Sparrow (*schistacea*) was at Rachel Carson Park in Maryland 23 November, a first for Maryland. In the Great Basin, Ted Floyd notes that all four distinctive subspecies—Slate-colored, Thick-billed, Sooty, and Red Fox Sparrows—occur in Utah and Nevada but that the Region lacks good data on their relative abundances. Gary Rosenberg (not surprisingly, a co-finder of Maryland's first *schistacea*!) and Roy Jones document all but Thick-billed from Arizona this season and encourage readers to distinguish the subspecies in the field and in their notes. Powdermill Nature Reserve in Pennsylvania banded its first Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow, and Maryland got another one this year. Are these really so scarce here? Virginia records reveal that naturalists pre-1950 detected this subspecies infrequently, but

the lack of records between 1942 and 1998 surely indicates inattention to the identification of subspecies here. I found it surprising that above-average numbers of Yellow Palm Warblers (*hypochrysea*) were worthy of comment in the Niagara River gorge and all around Ontario, with over 16 reports; I had not realized before how scarce that subspecies could be in the Great Lakes in fall. Subtle reports of two *cinnamomea* Solitary Sandpipers in Ontario, both juveniles seen in the narrow window 3-5 August, will hopefully spur those in the East to scrutinize their birds for this western subspecies.

A thorny problem for seekers of vagrant subspecies involves intergrade flickers. For whatever reason, true Red-shafted Flickers (subspecies *cafra*) are almost unknown in the East. This fall, in Virginia, two apparent intergrades of Yellow-shafted and Red-shafted were found, and in Florida, two flickers with some red in the rectrices were reported from Leon County, while another at O'Leno State Park had red webbing in the rectrices but "a black malar stripe and a brown face," thus an intergrade. Neither state has confirmed *cafra* records. Flickers also give Great Basin birders pause for study, especially in southern Nevada, where all three North America *Colaptes* populations (including Gilded Flicker) can be studied, along with intergrades and hybrids. Gilded Flickers are being seen there away from breeding areas, while likely Yellow-shafted Flickers are reported regularly out of range, along with a few intergrade Yellow-shafted/Red-shafted around Reno late in this past season. One wonders whether birds of hybrid origin (or intergrades) are more likely to be found out of range than birds of "pure" parentage: patterns of vagrancy in Black-headed x Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Spotted x Eastern Towhees, Lazuli x Indigo Buntings, Baltimore x Bullock's Orioles, and even Western x Clark's Grebes, might make interesting study.

## Closing thoughts: open questions

It is often thought but not often enough printed: bird collections that lose their captives make our study of bird distribution difficult. And, sometimes, that just plain ticks us off.

An adult Common Crane was observed with an adult Sandhill and a hybrid juvenile at Barraute, Québec in September and October. This scenario has played out in New Jersey and Nebraska as well, but the New Jersey bird is probably a former captive (so the thinking goes), whereas these mid-continent birds might be coming over with Siberian Sandhills (so the thinking goes). I cower behind the mantle of agnosticism. I think it's safe to say that we all wish there were a sure means to determine how the Demoiselle Crane arrived at the San Joaquin Valley, a potential first record for the New World. A few records of the species from Alaska or the Northwest would help the case for natural vagrancy here; the several hundred captives held in American collections make it a tough case.

A Ruddy Shelduck made an August appearance at Jug Bay, Maryland. Readers of *Birders Journal* know that a wild flock made it to Southampton Island, Nunavut, a first firm record of vagrants in North America. This gaudy near-goose has reached Greenland, Iceland, and other North Atlantic islands, and the Nunavut record makes one wonder about those wary birds that show up along the Eastern Seaboard at the same season as European wanderers. What can one say of the similarly handsome but suspect Barnacle Geese that materialized from the Canadian Maritimes to the Middle Atlantic Region this fall and winter, beginning with one in Moncton, New Brunswick 3 November? A summary of this possible "flight" will appear in the next issue. Meanwhile, Paul Hess and Marshall Iliff are preparing a paper on the species's occurrence in North America; contact them at [miliff@aol.com](mailto:miliff@aol.com) with any of your old records.—Ed.

