

New England

After the previous winter of record-breaking warmth, it should have come as no surprise to New Englanders that 2002-2003 was a return to business as usual in the north-temperate zone. Over the Region as a whole, average temperature ranked in the lowest 25% of winters on record, with states bordering the Gulf of Maine (Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts) colder than the Regional average. In many areas, there was no hint of a January or February thaw. Snowfall was roughly normal, although this was a result of below-average precipitation to the north and above-average precipitation to the south. The latter was aided by five northeasters that swept ashore between mid-December and mid-February.

The effects of this "normal" winter on New England's birdlife were generally pretty obvious. Early freezing of northern lakes and rivers forced waterfowl and eagles south by mid-winter, and cold temperatures in general probably resulted in one of the lowest totals of lingering half-hardies in recent years. In contrast, there were four hummingbirds in the Region, including Massachusetts's first Calliope Hummingbird and a *Selaphorus* well to the north in coastal Maine. Carolina Wrens, a species not known for its cold tolerance, managed to hold on to most of the range expansion facilitated by the winter of 2001-2002. The northeasters resulted in exceptional numbers of seabirds, particularly alcids, along the Massachusetts coast, with higher-than-usual numbers of Razorbills even penetrating well into Long Island Sound.

Rarities not associated with any particular weather event included Massachusetts's second Long-billed Murrelet, three Tufted Ducks in Vermont, a Black-throated Gray Warbler in Connecticut (continuing from November), and an intriguing kingbird on Cape Cod. Northern finches were essentially absent, and even northern areas reported fewer birds than normal for a non-invasion year. And finally, several now-famous visitors to Massachusetts returned for another winter, including Eared Grebe, Tufted Duck, and Gyrfalcon.

Abbreviations: Eastham (Eastham, *Barnstable*, MA), M.A.R.C. (Massachusetts Avian Records Committee), Nantucket (Nantucket I., MA), P'town (Provincetown, *Barnstable*, MA), Quabbin (Quabbin Res., w. MA), Rockport (Rockport, *Essex*, MA).



LOONS THROUGH VULTURES

The exceptional flight of Red-throated Loons observed in e. Massachusetts in Nov apparently did not result in more than the usual number of birds wintering in the Region. This season's Pacific Loons included one in Portland, *Cumberland*, ME in mid-Dec (*vide* WT), and 2 in Massachusetts: Eastham 12 Dec and Woods Hole, *Barnstable* 4-5 Jan. The Eared Grebe returned to Gloucester, *Essex*, MA for its 8th consecutive winter. Another was seen sporadically at Groton, *New London*, CT 16 Jan+ (D. Provencher). A single Red-necked Grebe lingered through 5 Jan at Ferrisburg, *Addison*, VT (TM, A. Strong). Western Grebes were all in Massachusetts: Plymouth 7 Dec, Scituate 1 Jan, and Nahant 2-20 Jan.

During the northeaster of 12 Dec, 3 Greater Shearwaters were seen off Rock-

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port (RH). A total of 440 Northern Gannets was seen from the same location on the same date, but this number paled in comparison to counts elsewhere in Massachusetts during Dec, including 1000 in Chatham, *Barnstable* 7 Dec and 1650 at P'town 25 Dec (both BN). By late Dec, good numbers of gannets had also moved into Rhode Island waters, with 1672 and 750 on the S. Kingston C.B.C. and Block I. C.B.C., respectively. Finally, a gannet in Wayland, *Middlesex*, MA 4 Dec (A. Webber) provided one of fewer than a dozen inland

records for the Bay State. Great Cormorants seemed more common inland than usual this season. Some 43 were reported along the Merrimack R. in Lawrence, *Essex*, MA 25 Jan, and up to 10 were farther upriver in Manchester, *Hillsborough*, NH 27 Feb. One bird was even present until 21 Jan at Laconia, *Belknap*, NH (C. Anderson). In the Connecticut Valley, single individuals were at Holyoke, *Hampden*, MA 14 Dec, Quabbin 28 Dec, and Hinsdale, *Cheshire*, NH 29 Jan. Seven spent all or part of the winter up the Naugatuck R. in Waterbury, *New Haven*, CT (M. Szantyr).

Lingering herons were scarce—represented by a single Great Egret at Weekapaug, *Washington*, RI 5 Jan and a total of 17 Black-crowned Night-Herons in e. Massachusetts in Jan and Feb. The only Black Vulture report away from Connecticut was a single bird at Ashaway, *Washington*, RI, a location where several were present during the previous winter. Eight Turkey Vultures on the Newburyport C.B.C. (*Essex*, MA) 22 Dec represented only the 2nd record for the count (JB), and other wayward buzzards included singles in Amherst, *Hampshire*, MA 20 Feb and Portland, ME through most of Feb (DL).

WATERFOWL

Dead Creek W.M.A., *Addison*, VT still hosted 2500 Snow Geese 1 Dec, but it

appears that the large flocks departed soon thereafter. The Regional total of 6 Greater White-fronted Geese is a little below average for recent years. There were 2 in Connecticut and a group of 4 that spent all of Feb at Fairhaven, *Bristol*, MA. A Barnacle Goose at Upton, *Worcester*, MA 31 Jan was suspected to be an escapee, but 2 at Rehoboth, *Bristol*, MA 1 Feb (M. Larson et al.) were deemed more likely to be wild. Final word on these birds awaits deliberation by the M.A.R.C. There were 3 Tundra Swans in Connecticut in early Dec, and 5 appeared in Coventry, *Kent*, RI

in late Jan, marking about the 20th winter that the species has wintered in this location (*vide* M. Tucker). Despite the early freeze and generally cold temperatures, a few ducks managed to show up in unusual inland locations. Three Wood Ducks during Feb in New Hampshire was definitely an above-average total, as was the count of 3 Gadwalls in w. Massachusetts. Eurasian Wigeon numbers were about normal and included one in New Hampshire, 8 in Massachusetts, at least 5 in Rhode Island, and 3 in Connecticut. Northern Shovelers were limited to 12 scattered around e. Massachusetts, with the exception of a single bird in Exeter, *Rockingham*, NH 1 Dec. The only Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal was at Eastham 11 Jan. An unusual male hybrid between Wood Duck and Mallard was observed in

Burlington, *Chittenden*, VT 19 Feb (TM).

Lingering diving ducks included 6 Redhead at Stratham, *Rockingham*, NH 1 Dec (one staying though 12 Dec) and 3 more at the Crown Point Bridge, *Addison*, VT 26 Dec—10 Jan. Redheads paled in comparison to another waterfowl find at the Crown Point Bridge. On 26 Dec, birders located 2 male Tufted Ducks (2nd state record) in a flock of 1400 Greater Scaup (itself an impressive find; TM, m. ob.). These were joined by a female, and one of the males was still present 5 Jan. Five more Tufted Ducks were in Massachusetts, including a bird at the Wachusett Res., *Worcester* for the 8th winter in a row. Rhode Island hosted 2 of this Eurasian species: one in Wakefield, *Washington* 28 Dec+ and one in Providence, *Providence* 15-28 Feb. King Eiders in unusual places included one on Great Bay, NH 9-13 Dec and 2 in coastal Connecticut. A Black Scoter was similarly out of place along the Connecticut R. in Greenfield, *Franklin*, MA 9 Jan. Even Long-tailed Ducks showed up inland, with birds in Laconia, NH 28 Dec, Turners Falls, *Franklin*, MA 9 Jan, and Hinsdale, NH in Jan (C. Petrak). Where Long-tailed Ducks are supposed to be, 250,000 were tallied in Nantucket Sound 22 Dec (a number similar to the C.B.C. total in the previous winter).

Numbers of Harlequin Ducks at traditional locations in Maine, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island were roughly normal, with a peak regional count of 104 at Rockport during Jan (JB). More unusual were a single Harlequin at Stamford, *Fairfield*, CT 10 Jan, and another well up the Connecticut R. in Littleton, *Grafton*, NH 3 Jan (T. MacPherson). One of only a handful of inland records for the Granite State. With the early and thorough freeze, numbers of Hooded Mergansers seemed lower in inland areas, an observation conveniently balanced

by slightly higher numbers in s. coastal areas. A flock of 500 Ruddy Ducks in Old Saybrook, *Middlesex*, CT 1 Jan (D. Sosen-



This Rufous or Allen's Hummingbird was photographed at Hancock, Maine 2 December 2002, a first winter-season record for the state. The bird was last seen after a snowstorm the following day. Photograph by Ken and Sue Noddin.



This dark-morph Gyrfalcon at Black Falcon Marine Terminal, South Boston, Massachusetts 19 January 2003 had been banded at Logan Airport in 1998. Photograph by Phil Brown.

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sky) was an impressive early-winter total for the Nutmeg State.

RAPTORS THROUGH ALCIDS

It was not a particularly interesting winter for birds of prey. Lingering Ospreys included one well to the n. on the Orono C.B.C. (*Penopscot*, ME) 15 Dec, an apparently overwintering bird along the Naugatuck R. in Waterbury, CT (G. Allen, m. ob.), and two Dec sightings in Massachusetts. The prolonged freeze caused Bald Eagles to shift southward in late Jan, when up to 80 frequented the lower Connecticut Valley in Connecticut, and roughly 50 were seen along the Georges R. in Warren, Knox, ME (*fide* D. Reimer). Golden Eagles were also regular in these two locations, with 4 in Connecticut and one in Maine. The Jan snow may also have forced Rough-legged Hawks southward just prior to the eagle movement. Numbers in e. Massachusetts in Dec were suggestive of a good flight (*fide* RH), and Jan numbers in Connecticut were also higher than usual (*fide* GH). Perhaps representative of this population shift was the change in numbers in Vermont's Champlain Valley: from 38 on 24 Dec to 15 on 12 Jan (*fide* WS).

Observers in Maine have noted a gradual increase in the number of Peregrine Falcons wintering in the state: there were 8 this season in comparison to an average of 2 per winter for the previous 11 winters (*fide* JD). Boston's Gyrfalcon returned for a 2nd winter, and observers were able to read its band, revealing that it had originally been banded as a juv. at Logan Airport in Jan 1998. Other Gyrfalcons were at Grand Isle, *Grand Isle*, VT 30 Jan and Brunswick, *Sagadahoc*, ME in late Jan.

Unusual shorebirds were few, highlighted by a Greater Yellowlegs well inland in Sheffield, *Berkshire*, MA 1 Jan (W. Cook). A Spotted Sandpiper in Providence, RI the next day (D. Finzia, R. Farrell) provided a record-late date for the Ocean State. As usual, Cape Cod hosted a few lingering *Calidris*, including a White-rumped Sandpiper in Eastham 15 Jan (W. Petersen). In nearby Chatham, 3 Western Sandpipers on 15 Dec had dwindled to one by 6 Jan (P. Flood).

Pomarine Jaegers continue to set winter records for Massachusetts. Twenty-four seen at Rockport 12 Dec (RH) is twice the previous Dec high. In Cape Cod Bay, 21 were seen from Dennis, *Barnstable* 26 Dec (P. Flood et al.), with 10 still present in the area 4 Jan (BN). Winter gulls showed no notable pattern of distribution, with the exception of Connecticut, where they were viewed as more abundant than usual

(*fide* GH). A bird described as an ad. Yellow-legged Gull was seen in Salisbury, Essex, MA 19 Feb (RH) and awaits review by M.A.R.C. In conjunction with the big alcid flights, 1500 Black-legged Kittiwakes were tallied at Rockport 14 Dec (RH), with another 1260 in Cape Cod Bay 4 Jan (m. ob.). Two individuals of this pelagic gull even made it to Connecticut's portion of Long Island Sound, where the species is considered rare (*fide* GH). A Common Tern barely made it into the season at Wellfleet, *Barnstable*, MA 1 Dec (BN). Massachusetts and Rhode Island each hosted 2 Forster's Terns, with the latest being at Falmouth, *Barnstable*, MA 11 Jan (G. Tepke).

Alcid activity was dominated by impressive numbers of Razorbills and murrets along most of the New England coast, but smaller species also warrant mention. First and foremost among the latter was a Long-billed Murrelet at Rockport 3 Jan (RH), providing only the 2nd record for Massachusetts (the first was brought in by a cat in 1982). The high count for Dovekie was 20 at Eastham 26 Dec, and 3 Atlantic Puffins made a high count for the York C.B.C. in Maine 16 Dec.

OWLS THROUGH CROWS

While 3 Barn Owls in Connecticut and one on Nantucket are relatively normal for a New England winter, one in Vermont is certainly not. In light of its rarity in the Green Mountain State, a report of a Barn Owl from Poultny, *Rutland* 1 Feb awaits

review by the Vermont records committee. Among n. owls, Snowy Owls staged one of their weakest incursions in recent winters. For example, the statewide total for Massachusetts was only 6-7 birds, a number often exceeded at Logan Airport alone. A single Northern Hawk Owl briefly visited Sandwich, *Carroll*, NH 29-30 Dec (R. Ridgely, m. ob.). Short-eared Owls seemed more abundant than usual in Maine, e. Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.

If any taxonomic group would be expected to suffer in a cold and snowy winter, it would be the Trochilidae. Nonetheless, after a moderate fall influx, there were four hummingbirds reported among three New England States between early Dec and mid-Jan. Three were *Selasphorus* species, including one at Bridgewater, *Plymouth*, MA 1 Dec (R. & F. Ellis). Farthest n., and last seen after a snowstorm, was a probable female Rufous Hummingbird in Hancock, *Hancock*, ME through 3 Dec (ph. K. and S. Noddin). Lasting longest was a bird in Old Saybrook, CT through 13 Jan (ph. m. ob.). Trumping all the previous birds was Massachusetts's and the Region's first **Calliope Hummingbird** at a feeder in Eastham through 31 Dec (J. Kricher, A. Fuller et al.). The bird was first detected in Nov but not conclusively identified until later in the winter, when it was also photographed.

Both Red-headed Woodpeckers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were more common than usual. Noteworthy totals of the

SA Strong northeasterly winds on 12 Dec gave Massachusetts seawatchers an excellent opportunity to observe pelagic species in large numbers close to shore. Shearwaters, gannets, jaegers, and kittiwakes have already been mentioned, but those groups' showings paled in comparison to the alcid flight. After the storm, numbers continued relatively high into early January, and Razorbills, like kittiwakes, made it all the way into Connecticut waters.

The star of the show in e. Massachusetts saw was Common Murre, a species normally restricted to areas much farther offshore. At Rockport, a mind-boggling 420 were counted 12 Dec (RH), with 39 on 3 Jan (RH). Both these totals eclipse the previous state high count of 21 from February 2002. In addition, if one considers the 1800 unidentified large alcids on 12 Dec, it is possible that over 1000 Common Murres passed by on that day. Other identified large alcids on 12 Dec included 14 Thick-billed Murres and 1180 Razorbills (RH). Cape Cod also had its share of large alcids on 12 Dec, when 650 Razorbills and 800 unidentified "footballs" were seen from Dennis (P. Flood).

To the north, Maine and New Hampshire were not without some impressive totals of Razorbills, although these were not directly associated with the 12 Dec storm. In Maine, 234 were recorded on the York C.B.C. 16 Dec, a count that also tallied 12 Thick-billed Murres and a Common Murre. Just across the border in New Hampshire, 42 Razorbills were counted 21 Dec, with an even more impressive total of 181 on 1 Jan (both A. & B. Delorey).

Large alcids also made a significant incursion into Long Island Sound. At the mouth of the sound, Rhode Island's three coastal C.B.C.s tallied 318, 156, and 52 Razorbills in the last third of December, with good numbers continuing into January and February (*fide* DE). Up to a dozen of these large alcids were regular off e. Connecticut through January, and 8 made it to the state's extreme w. end at Greenwich, *Fairfield*, CT 24 Dec. Thick-billed Murres were less common in both states, with 8 on the Napatree Point C.B.C., *Washington*, RI 22 Dec and a single bird at Waterford, *New London*, CT 4 Jan.

former include 3 in Rhode Island and 6 in Connecticut, while sapsucker standouts included 3 in New Hampshire and 19 in Massachusetts. A few Eastern Phoebes lingered despite the deep freeze. Two made it at least into mid-Jan in Wayland, Middlesex, MA and Richmond, Washington, RI. Top honors, however, go to a phoebe along the Connecticut R. at Bellow's Falls, Windsor, VT through at least 14 Feb (*vide* WS). Last but not least, a Thick-billed Kingbird was reported in Falmouth, MA 2 Dec (I. Nisbet). The bird was never relocated, and the M.A.R.C. was not able to accept the record to species. Nonetheless, the bird in question was clearly *not* a kingbird species previously recorded in Massachusetts, any of which would constitute an exceptional record.

A few lingering Blue-headed Vireos are normal for early Dec in s. New England, but not so the White-eyed Vireo seen in W. Gloucester, Essex, MA 5 Dec (RH). There is only one later record of this species for Massachusetts. Far to the n. and w., Gray Jays were observed nest-building at Victory Bog, Essex, VT in late Feb, providing what was likely the first confirmation for the state's new breeding bird atlas. This record also brings home the fact that weather conditions that force birders to consider tropical vacations are quite normal to birds of the boreal forest. A Fish Crow in Salem, Rockingham, NH 10 Dec provided one of only a few winter records for the state.

NUTHATCHES THROUGH FINCHES

Like virtually all n. irruptive species, Red-breasted Nuthatches were often quite hard to find over much of the Region. Carolina Wrens, on the other hand, seemed to do quite well despite the persistent sub-zero temperatures. It appears that the gains made during the previous warm winters were largely maintained, with reports (all at feeders) from Lancaster and Berlin, Coos, NH and Millinocket, Penobscot, ME. The Eastern Bluebird, another species that has increased dramatically as a winter resident in the Region, reached record-high numbers in Maine (*vide* JD). A Townsend's Solitaire was reported from Quabbin 11 Jan (M. Sylvia) but without accompanying details. American Robins, like bluebirds, are becoming increasingly common, espe-

cially in the balmy s. parts of New England. There is little better indication of this trend than a roost of 18,876 robins in the Great Swamp, Washington, RI 21 Dec. Single Varied Thrushes were reported from Hamden, New Haven, CT in late Jan,



Another westerner attempting to overwinter was this Western Tanager at Portsmouth, New Hampshire from middle December 2002 to 10 January (here 8 January) 2003, one of two Western Tanagers in the Region this season. Photograph by Steve Mirick.

and Gilford, Belknap, NH in late Feb. In a season with relatively few half-hardies, a Gray Catbird was inadvisably far n. in Houlton, Aroostook, ME through 14 Jan (L. Little, *vide* JD). Bohemian Waxwings were almost absent, even in their traditional strongholds of n. Maine and New Hampshire.

Not surprisingly, there were relatively few unusual warblers this winter, but a few records stand out. These include a Black-throated Blue in Hanover, Grafton, NH 3 Dec, and 2 Pine Warblers in nw. Vermont. More noteworthy were two holdovers from Nov, a Black-throated Gray Warbler at Hammonasset Beach S.P., New Haven, CT through 9 Jan, and a Hooded Warbler at Matunuck, Washington, RI through 2 Dec. More typical lingering warblers included 3 Nashvilles and 3 Black-and-whites in Dec, 8 Orange-crowneds (including an above-average 2 in Maine), and 2 Ovenbirds. Two Western Tanagers spent part of the winter in the Region. One frequented a feeder in Portsmouth, Rockingham, NH from mid-Dec through 10 Jan (ph., m. ob.), and the other was at Ninigret N.W.R., Washington, RI 26 Dec—18 Jan (m. ob.).

Unexpected sparrows included a Lark Sparrow was in Westerly, Washington, RI 22 Dec (S. Mitra); a wintering Harris's

Sparrow at Bloomfield, Hartford, CT; and single wintering Clay-colored in Newburyport, MA and Stamford, CT. Lincoln's Sparrows are not regular winter visitors to the Region, so a total of 3 was unusual. Two were in Connecticut (*vide* GH), while one at Cape Elizabeth, Cumberland provided only the 3rd winter record for Maine in the past 15 years (*vide* JD). A Rose-breasted Grosbeak was on Nantucket 2 Dec (B. Vigneau), with 2 more reported from Orleans, Barnstable, MA in late Feb (*vide* BN). The latter presumably appeared on the same southerly flow that brought an astoundingly early Blue Grosbeak to Chatham 23 Feb (J. Kenneally, *vide* BN). A Yellow-headed Blackbird was in W. Bridgewater MA 3-5 Dec (R. Finch, m. ob.). Baltimore Orioles seemed more common than usual, with 4 in Maine, at least 8 in Massachusetts, 2-3 in New Hampshire, and one in Woodstock, Windsor, VT 2 Dec. Irruptive

finches were almost nonexistent. Pine Grosbeaks were reported only from Maine, and even then in only three locations. Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins made it to a few locations in s. New England and were only slightly more common in the n. three states. Perhaps farthest afield were 5 Evening Grosbeaks in Guilford, New Haven, CT 13 Jan, especially since this species was scarce even far to the north.

EXOTICS

South-coastal New England's growing population of Monk Parakeets has regularly sent scattered individuals into Rhode Island and se. Massachusetts in recent years. This winter, one of these hardy birds appears to have crossed Buzzard's Bay, after which it was seen in Woods Hole, MA 5 Feb. Another parakeet in Pelham, Hillsborough, NH 6 Jan is more likely to have been a local escapee.

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