

# Atlantic Provinces & St. Pierre et Miquelon



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The weather during May 2005 in the Maritime provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island) had a stunning impact on migration throughout the Region. In a "normal" season, the jet stream typically oscillates back and forth over the provinces, bringing weather alternately foul and fair, with conditions rarely stable for long periods. And so it was through March and April, though precipitation was fifteen per cent above normal. But then came May, and the heavens opened, especially in southern and eastern mainland Nova Scotia. Halifax had triple its average

monthly rainfall: 319 mm, an all-time record. There were five days with more than 25 mm of rain, when normally there is but one. The wettest periods were 7–8 May (94 mm) and 19–24 May (99 mm). Temperatures were 1.5° C below normal (though there were no frosts), and there was fifty per cent less sunshine in May than April, instead of thirty-five per cent more. The direction of the prevailing winds, typically from the south in late spring, was mostly easterly (during the frequent rains), with northwesterly winds during the lulls in precipitation. The few periods of southerly flow came early in May, leaving mid-month (and later) migrants to face adverse conditions that persisted well into June. Consequently, many Neotropical migrants were late in arriving, and their numbers were quite depressed. Observers farther north in Newfoundland and on St. Pierre, where the weather was more temperate, all bemoaned the late arrival or outright absence of various species, especially warblers and flycatchers; only

eight species of warbler had reached St. Pierre and Miquelon by the end of May (and all in low numbers)—and no flycatchers at all. In addition to several provincial firsts, the Region documented a species new to North America.

**Abbreviations:** A.B.O. (Atlantic Bird Observatory); B.I. (Brier I., NS); B.P.I. (Bon Portage I., NS); C.S.I. (Cape Sable I., NS); G.M.I. (Grand Manan I., NB, including White Head I.); H.R.M. (Halifax Regional Municipality, NS); N.A.M.C. (North American Migration Count [Nova Scotia; 14 May]); P.E.I. (Prince Edward I.).

## LOONS THROUGH WATERFOWL

Red-necked Grebes showed a 75% decline off St. Pierre et Miquelon this year, with a maximum count of only 55 on 12 Mar (BL). The Apr–May heron flight was reasonably strong across Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, but only 3 Great Egrets reached P.E.I., and there were no sightings n. of the Maritimes. The Nova Scotia/New Brunswick totals were as follows: Great Egret 20/12; Snowy Egret 10/6; Little Blue Heron 5/3; Tricolored Heron 1/0; Cattle Egret 2/0; Green Heron 3/1; Yellow-crowned Night-Heron 2/0; Glossy Ibis 5/0. Extralimital Turkey Vultures included 3 at Apple River, NS 17 Apr (Kathleen Spicer), three sightings in n. New Brunswick in the latter half of Apr, and one at Georgetown, P.E.I. 2 May (Scott Sinclair).

The 3 Pink-footed Geese near Trenton, NS were last reported there 15 Mar, and they then reappeared at Nine Mile Creek, P.E.I. 23–31 Mar, where they had first been discovered in Dec 2004. Their subsequent departure for (presumed) points north further solidifies the consensus that these were wild birds. The number of migrant Snow Geese in nw. New Brunswick continues to grow, with perhaps 7000+ this year, including 2000 at St. Quentin 10 May (RL) and 5000 in the Restigouche Estuary 11 May (BD). Elsewhere there was an ad. blue morph at Mavillette Beach, Digby, NS 29 May (MN). A Graylag Goose took residence 24 Apr–2 May on a drill ship stationed 200 km se. of St. John's, NL (ph.). Mactavish reports that the Newfoundland Bird Committee has accepted the bird as wild; the species breeds abundantly in Iceland. This constitutes the first North American record for this European species. A Tundra Swan in the Grand Codroy River, NL 4–14 May (Don & Vivien Jones) was the first in the province in decades. There was a scattering of Eurasian Wigeons across the Region, one in Nova Scotia, 5+ in New Brunswick, 2 in St. Pierre et Miquelon, and a half-dozen around St. John's. There were 2 Common (Eurasian Green-winged) Teal in New Brunswick and one in Nova Scotia (annual in spring in both provinces), but one on Miquelon 22 May (RE) was just the 3rd for

the department. A brood of Northern Shovelers at Sackville, NB 9 May was remarkably early (Kathy Popma); in this Region, the species does not usually commence laying until late May. A female Canvasback on Murray River, P.E.I. 9–21 Mar (Rosemary Curley et al.) provided one of few provincial records, while 2 in St. Pierre et Miquelon 15 May (ph. FPA) constituted the 3rd occurrence for the islands. The Redhead that overwintered on B.I. remained through spring and by the end of May appeared to be paired with an American Black Duck, but there was no evidence of nesting. The only Tufted Ducks reported were 9 in St. John's in Mar and one in New Brunswick in early May. The best one-day total for Surf Scoter at the Point Lepreau B.O., NB was 5000+ 29 Apr, while the best count for Black Scoter in the Restigouche Estuary was 66,000 26 Apr (Mike Lushington). A count of 23 Barrow's Goldeneyes on the Sydney R., NS 7 Mar (Bev Sarty) was an impressive total for anywhere in the Region. Hooded Mergansers are fairly common in the Maritimes, but one in St. Pierre harbor 14–15 Mar (LJ) was most unusual there.

### HAWKS THROUGH GULLS

Two Red-shouldered Hawks near Caraquet, NB 2–5 May (Jocelyne Godin) were well beyond their known breeding range in the province. No Rough-legged Hawks were noted this spring on St. Pierre, where the species formerly nested. There were, unusually, numerous Golden Eagle sightings this spring, starting with presumed migrants in the south, with single ads. at B.I. 2 Mar (Carl Haycock), at Marys Pt., NB 13 Mar (David Christie), and at River Glade, *Westmoreland*, NB 21 Mar (Jim Wilson et al.). An imm. was noted at Masstown, NS 27 Mar (Bernard Jackson), and the last migrant was at the Canso Causeway, NS 3 Apr (June Jarvis et al.). Six weeks later there were three separate sightings of birds in w. Labrador: single imms. at Churchill Falls 13 May and Wabush Mines 14 May (both BD), and an individual reported somewhere in "w. Labrador" 15 May (*vide* Gordon Parsons).

A Common Moorhen was a good find at Mount Stewart, P.E.I. 31 May (DS), and by Jun, it was apparent that a pair was present; the species has yet to be documented as a nester in the province. Sandhill Cranes were again in the news. Two visited French River, P.E.I. 21–26 Apr (Chris MacKay et al.), and perhaps the same 2 then arrived at Canso, NS 5 May+. Breeding in the Region has yet to be confirmed. Newfoundland enjoyed a modest flight of European Golden-Plovers



This male Black-necked Stilt was present in Queens County, Nova Scotia 11–15 (here 13) April 2005. It represents the ninth (and earliest) provincial record. Photograph by Andy Dean.

this spring, with 8 s. of St. John's between 30 Apr and 9 May (BMT et al.) and 2 at Cape Bonavista 9 May (Jon Joy). A convincingly described Wilson's Plover was seen briefly at Scots Bay, NS 7 Apr (Ami McKay), the 11th



This adult Long-tailed Jaeger was found inland on the Kedgewick River, New Brunswick 5 (here 6) May 2005—the fifth documented provincial record and the second inland record. Photograph by Roy LaPointe.

provincial record. One pair of Semipalmated Plovers returned to breed on C.S.I., their southernmost breeding station in the world, but rather small numbers were noted in St.

Pierre et Miquelon this year, where they regularly breed (RE). The Canadian breeding population of American Oystercatcher (on C.S.I.) has doubled to two pairs, a long-awaited increase (one pair has successfully fledged young in each of the past three years). A Black-necked Stilt at St. Catherine's Road, *Queens*, NS 11–15 May (Andy Dean et al., ph.) was the 9th (and earliest) provincial record. Spring Lesser Yellowlegs are very rare in the n. part of the Region, but Etcheberry saw and heard one on St. Pierre 30 May. A Solitary Sandpiper was seen and photographed on St. Pierre 7 May (PB); the species is rare anywhere in the Region in spring. A flock of 14 Whimbrels on C.S.I. 29 Apr was an unusual concentration for spring (MN), and they were joined the following day by a Eurasian Whimbrel of the nominate subspecies, the 11th provincial record. Red Knot, a "Species of High Concern," is increasingly scarce in the Region in spring; the only reports this season were of a single bird in Nova Scotia, 12–14 May on C.S.I., and 14 in New Brunswick at Maisonette Dune, *Gloucester* 4 Jun (Marcel David). One in S.P.M. in Mar and Apr was possibly a wintering bird, most unusual so far north. Sanderling is also a "Species of High Concern," and just 17 were tallied on the N.A.M.C., well below the nine-year average of 90. The only Ruffs were a male at Kilbride, NL 9–15 May (BMT et al.) and one at Moncton, NB 17 May (Louis-Émile Cormi-

er). Bad weather 29 May grounded 45 Short-billed Dowitchers at St. Leonard, NB en route to cen. Labrador (RL); all but 2 were gone next day after the weather cleared. Six-

**SA** The unusual spring weather caused several remarkable fallouts of migrants 18–29 May along the approaches to the Bay of Fundy. Brian Dalzell, who lives on Grand Manan, believes that migrants, which normally cross the Gulf of Maine on a tail-wind from Massachusetts to Nova Scotia in a single night, were held back by the persistent easterly gales and eventually went around the Gulf of Maine instead, striking out for Nova Scotia somewhere in the vicinity of Mount Desert Island in Maine. He reports:

"I can't seem to find a common thread to tie [the fall-outs] together. Suffice to say it was an unusual event, perhaps on the scale of one year in 20. If it had happened 20 years ago, I suspect the island of Grand Manan would have been dripping with hundreds of thousands of birds. As it was, there were only tens of thousands of birds, all on Machias Seal Island (mostly between 0200–0700, 18–20 May), White Head Island (mid-mornings on 19–20 May), Kent Island 29 May (1600–1800), and the very southern tip of Grand Manan Island the morning of 29 May. There were also reports of birds coming aboard lobster boats at sea. Considering the large numbers noted by Jim Wilson on White Head Island (20 May), by Wheelwright on Kent Island 29 May, by Ralph Eldridge on Machias Seal Island (18–20 May), and by Merv Cormier at the southern end of Grand Manan 29 May, I suspect many tens of thousands also perished at sea, unseen, which may have accounted for reductions noted in Nova Scotia this spring of many passerine species. Doppler radar imagery from the mid-late May period of the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy would certainly make a rewarding field of study for a keen student."

Some notable New Brunswick counts included 100+ Blackburnian Warblers on Machias Seal I. 18 May (RAE), and 200+ Swainson's Thrushes in 250 m on Kent I. 29 May, but the real numbers were tallied on 19–20 May. Ralph Eldridge, lightkeeper on Machias Seal I., reported the following from early in the morning of 19 May, as he watched birds migrating through the beam of the lighthouse. "I just came inside, having spent the past three and a half hours (0300–0530) watching a nice flight moving through. Warblers dominated, but Lincoln's Sparrows, Ovenbirds, orioles, thrushes, flycatchers, and other species were well represented, along with a steady supply of resident Leach's Storm-Petrels. [The passage of migrants] looks just like driving into heavy snow with your headlights on high beam."

Jim and Jean Wilson were on White Head Island; they report that "by about 1130 the air was full of birds, with tens of thousands present, warblers, Alder and Least Flycatchers, Indigo Buntings, Scarlet Tanagers, Baltimore Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks; they were all in their spring colors, and many were singing. All had apparently made landfall sometime during the late morning or early afternoon and were hungry. We paused a moment to listen to the constant snapping of bird beaks above us, as hundreds and hundreds of warblers fed on the many insects present. A spectacular migration day: the best one we have ever been privileged to witness here in New Brunswick." The warblers' order of abundance was: Northern Parula, Black-and-white, Magnolia, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, with thousands of each present. The fallout also reached Nova Scotia, though to a lesser extent. On B.P.I., banders netted 160 birds and counted hundreds per hour passing overhead, with Magnolia Warbler the most common. Fishermen on Seal I. reported one of the heaviest concentrations of songbirds they had ever seen, with many birds lingering post-fallout, well into Jun.

ty Wilson's Snipe 1 Apr at Machias Seal I. (RAE) were notably early and were also the largest assemblage ever noted in New Brunswick. There were several Wilson's Phalarope sightings away from their tiny breeding population in New Brunswick: one female 14 May near East Berlin, *Queens*, NS (Dorothy Poole) and a female at Kilbride, NL 6–11 May (Ken Knowles et al.). Strong easterly gales during the last week of May

steered Red-necked Phalaropes into the Bay of Fundy, with 200+ off B.I. 28 May (EM) and 1000+ along the e. side of G.M.I. 31 May (BD, Laurie Murison).

Early-season Long-tailed Jaegers are unexpected but not unprecedented in the Region. A well-described ad. was at Jeddore Harbour, NS 25 Apr (Doug Baker), while a far-inland ad. was a special treat for New Brunswick birders, along the Kedgewick R.

5–6 May (Patrice Emond et al., ph.). This is the 6th "unassailable" (BD) report for the province and only the 2nd inland (the first inland was a skeleton found at River Glade 16 Jun 1942). There were 2 each of Laughing Gulls (25 Apr, 25 May, both in Nova Scotia) and Mew (Common) Gulls, one at New Glasgow, NS 9 Apr (KM) and the Stratford, P.E.I. bird, last noted 23 Mar (DS). Lesser Black-backed Gulls are now so routine that they are better monitored at the provincial level, rather than through this journal.

### DOVES THROUGH STARLING

A moribund Yellow-billed Cuckoo at River Bourgeois, NS 1 May (George Digout) was a rare spring discovery. Between mid-Mar and mid-Apr, Northern Hawk Owls moved southward from Québec and nw. New Brunswick s. to the Northumberland Strait and throughout P.E.I. Among the 15+ sightings were an unprecedented 5 in P.E.I., including 2 at Cavendish 23 Mar (Eric Marcum) and an injured female that subsequently died near Souris, P.E.I. 18 Mar (*vide* DS). Boreal Owls in Nova Scotia again nested successfully in Cape Breton (in a nest box), as well as in *Guysborough*, the latter representing the species' first documented Nova Scotia mainland nesting (Randy Lauff). Another Boreal Owl was found dead on a roadside 9 Apr near Union Corner, *Prince*, P.E.I. (Barry & Donna Martin), furnishing one of very few provincial records. Two Boreal Owls were noted 2–3 Mar on St. Pierre, one of which flew into a greenhouse and was subsequently released. An extralimital Chimney Swift was at St. Pierre 12 May



The arrival of this Redwing at Quidi Vidi Gut, St. John's, Newfoundland 3 April 2005 coincided to the day with a large arrival of localized Icelandic breeders. Photograph by Bruce Mactavish.

(BL). One of the Red-headed Woodpeckers recorded at Canso, NS wintered, and 3 migrants were noted elsewhere in the province in Apr and May. The great Red-bellied Woodpecker invasion fizzled out as spring progressed, though there were scattered sightings in the three maritime provinces through mid-May; and at least four pairs were reported, with nesting anticipated but not reported.

Two Scissor-tailed Flycatchers graced the Region this spring. One at Louis Head, *Shelburne*, NS 14 May (Mike Kennie) was the province's 13th, and a more cooperative bird 1-4 May at Alberton, P.E.I. (Garth MacIssac, m.ob., ph.) was the province's overdue first occurrence. There was an exceptional influx of rare vireos into New Brunswick late in the season, perhaps a result of the odd weather. Eight White-eyed Vireos (7 ads.) and 2 Yellow-throated Vireos on G.M.A. 29 May (MC) were without precedent, and a lone White-eyed Vireo was found in the far n. of the province 25-27 May at Pointe-Verte, *Gloucester* (Roger Guitard).

There may only be one remaining Purple Martin colony in Nova Scotia, in Amherst. For the 2nd year in a row, no martins returned to their former Oxford colony, which as recently as 1999 fledged dozens of young. Successive cold springs decimated the breeding ads., and there has been no recovery. Two martins reached St. Pierre in the first week of May, where they are very rare (RE). It may be that easterly gales during May are becoming more frequent in this Region, with deleterious impacts on swallows (BD). A Cliff Swallow colony in G.M.I. was reduced by two-thirds to eight pairs after the sustained cool, wet weather, and anecdotal reports elsewhere in the Region suggests that swallow populations are suffering. A single Cliff Swallow was noted at North Lake, P.E.I. 31 May (Ray Cooke); the species is unexpectedly rare in that province. St. Pierre had its first-ever nest of Red-breasted Nuthatch this season (RE). Northern Wheatears were reported only from Newfoundland, with 6 between 30 Apr and 7 May, 5 of them along the e. coast. A feeder-watcher on Long I., Digby, NS provided an excellent description of a male **Mountain Bluebird** that spent 20 minutes in his yard in mid-Apr (*fide* BMy); this is the 7th provincial record. An exceptional 5 Townsend's Solitaires wintered in New Brunswick, 4 in *Gloucester* (one until 15 Apr) and one in *Annapolis*. A Redwing 3 Apr at St. John's (BMT et al.) was thought to be a spring vagrant rather than a wintering bird (many arrived on Iceland the same day), as was one photographed on St. Pierre 10 Apr (Denis Moulin), the first record for the department. Brown Thrashers, rare in spring, were reported from White's Lake, NS 3 May (BMy) and South Melville, P.E.I. 11 May (Pe-

ter Feldstein). One was notably early 19 Apr at St. Leonard, NB (Charlotte LaPointe).

### WARBLERS THROUGH FINCHES

A male Prothonotary Warbler was seen on B.P.I. 3 May (A.B.O.), while one on G.M.I. 17-29 May (AC, Roger LeBlanc, ph.) was the longest staying ever for the province. A Worm-eating Warbler was banded on B.P.I. 6 May (A.B.O.). A male Hooded Warbler on B.I. 1 Apr was record early in the province



This male Western Tanager at Margate, Prince Edward Island was present only on 10 May 2005; it marked a first provincial record. Photograph by Les Homans.

by five days (Sean McDormand). Two other males appeared this spring, both in G.M.I., on 29 (MC) & 30 May (Laurie Murison). The annual Apr-May roster of tanagers and cardinalids was long this year, with especially large numbers of Indigo Buntings, though the flight barely extended to P.E.I. and did not cross the Cabot Strait to Newfoundland. Among the colorful visitors were scores of Indigo Buntings (100+ in Nova Scotia, 50+ in New Brunswick, and 3 on Prince Edward I.), 24 Blue Grosbeaks (8 in New Brunswick and twice that number in Nova Scotia), 7 Summer Tanagers (5 in Nova Scotia, 2 in New Brunswick), 61+ Scarlet Tanagers (21 in Nova Scotia, 40 in New Brunswick), and a male **Western Tanager** in P.E.I. 10 May (Barb Gaudet et al., ph.), a provincial first.

Five spring arrivals of Eastern Towhee were noted across mainland Nova Scotia in Apr, an excellent spring total. The North Rustico, P.E.I. Eastern Towhee was last reported 6 Mar, while the Port Williams, NS bird remained until at least 19 Mar. New Brunswick generated most of the sparrow news this spring. There were 3 Clay-colored Sparrows in May, while a Lark Sparrow, only the 4th

spring record, was reported at Machias Seal I. 14 May (RAE). Savannah Sparrows are generally considered early migrants, but the late-May fallouts included hundreds of Savannahs. A researcher studying the species on Kent I. started banding them, thinking they were resident birds; he soon realized they were in passage and that all were females, which is perhaps to be expected. Nevertheless, this late migration of large numbers of females was unprecedented in his 20+ years of studying the species. A pair of experienced birders from Massachusetts provided convincing details of a Seaside Sparrow at New River Beach, *Charlotte*, NB 29 May (*fide* Don Gibson), the first ever in spring for the province. The New Brunswick wintering Harris's Sparrow was last seen 3 Apr, while the Golden-crowned Sparrow continued through 4 May. Several Dickcissels in Canso, NS lingered into May, while one in G.M.I. 28 May was a good spring find for the province, and 2 were found at coastal migrant traps in Nova Scotia in May. The New Brunswick Western Meadowlark was last seen 10 Apr.

Rusty Blackbirds are declining in s. parts of the Region (only one on St. Pierre this spring), and perhaps on the island of Newfoundland as well, so it was slightly reassuring to get a report from Labrador, where 150+ were tallied 14 May in Labrador City (N.A.M.C.). Orchard Orioles were reported only in May, with 2 on G.M.I. (BD) and 13 in Nova Scotia, all but one in the 2nd half of the month, including a remarkable 5 on B.I. 29-31 May (EM).

Purple Finches were in fine fettle across the Maritimes, as evidenced by a count of 2500+ during a day of birding the lower Saint John R., NB 6 Mar (MC, Allen Gorham). Three thousand were tallied on the N.A.M.C., the highest in the 10 years of the count. Red Crossbills were widespread (199 on the N.A.M.C.) and outnumbered the few White-winged Crossbills, a reverse of the situation in most years. Pine Siskins were abundant across the mainland through the season, with 6000 on the N.A.M.C.; many individual feeders in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia hosted dozens or hundreds.

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