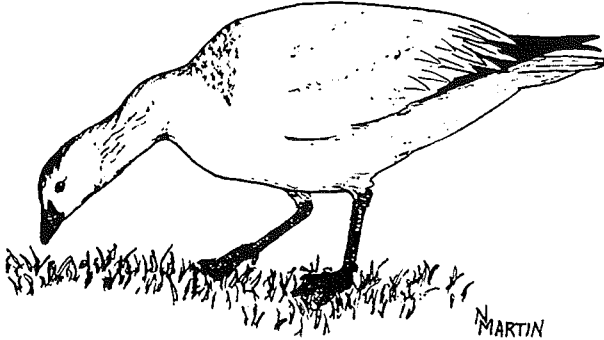




Records of Vermont Birds

Volume 18 Number 4 - Autumn 1990

ROSS' GOOSE



FALL MIGRATION 1990

1 August to 30 November

George "Terry" Hall, Seasonal Editor

At the risk of sounding trite, words like average, lackluster or uneventful may be applicable to fall 1990, but for this editor as I try for the first time to make some sense of the data, such generalizations are not appropriate. I found the task exciting and challenging, if frustrating at times, for it was difficult to pin down any definite trends, and so I present the data without much "editorial" comment. Each season has highlights and this one was no exception with two new state records, several rare shorebird sightings and some excellent banding and hawkwatch data. This occurred with no major weather systems to affect migration.

August was warm and wet, with heavy rains and thunderstorms in the first two weeks and again late in the month. Birders along Lake Champlain found an adult LAUGHING GULL in Burlington on the 9th, and then 2 juvenile BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKES which were well photographed near Sandbar Causeway in South Hero on the 20th, as well as the first Little Gulls of the season. An optimistic report of a hen Spruce Grouse with 3 nearly grown young came from the Yellow Bogs area in August, and further highlights include numerous and widely scattered reports of Great Egret throughout the southern part of Vermont.

In general, the weather was cooler and drier in September with a couple of cold fronts affecting conditions in the first ten days and again in mid-month, with more storms in the third week. Each of these fronts produced some heavy rain and winds, and perhaps enhanced some passerine fallouts, noticed at banding stations active at Woodstock and West Brattleboro. On 9/14, both KENTUCKY and Connecticut Warbler were banded at Goodenough Road, West Brattleboro. The Kentucky was a 7th state record; a female netted within a few hundred yards of the place where singing males have been recorded twice in spring in the last few years. Also in the southern part of the state, a SANDHILL CRANE was observed flying over the Winhall Hawk Watch on the 16th, on the heels of a cold front; and an adult LITTLE BLUE HERON seen in a small pond behind a school in Manchester 9/4 was carefully described. A "pelagic" trip on Lake Champlain produced

an adult LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL off Grand Isle as further testimony to how productive Dick Lavalley's frequent excursions on the lake can be.

Waterfowl activity picked up in October, as did the weather. This month was the wettest October on record for New England, and a major storm moved through on the 18th, producing high winds and heavy rain statewide, to be followed by a hard freeze and then another storm system producing flood warnings for Vermont's streams. This month brought two first state records, both waterfowl and not unexpected. A hunter legally shot a female FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge on the 13th to provide all the documentation necessary for this first acceptable Vermont record, although the species does show up on occasion in the New England region. More predictable, but very exciting, was the discovery of an immature ROSS' GOOSE at Dead Creek on the 28th, for another 1st state record (and 1st for New England record). As the numbers of Snow Geese have increased in recent years, it was just a question of time before this central Arctic breeder came east. Birders spent the next month closely examining the flocks of snows, and did manage to locate additional birds while learning how frustrating the separation of these very similar birds can be. Also at Dead Creek, a GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE of the Greenland race was found on October 11, for a 6th state record. October produced some interesting shorebird sightings including Whimbrel and one Red Phalarope in the Champlain Valley and another Red Phalarope and probable HUDSONIAN GODWIT (11th report to RVB) in the Connecticut River valley. Another highlight this month was the banding of one and a sighting of another Orange-crowned Warbler, always a rarely encountered migrant.

Finally, November weather was seasonal, generally very cloudy and cool with moderate winds and only one major snow-rain storm on the 10th. Birding activity slowed down in this somber month as most migrants are gone, banding and hawkwatching tapers off and birders tend to look forward to Christmas Bird Count time. Nevertheless, some interesting records were produced including 7 TUNDRA SWANS on Johnson Pond in Shrewsbury, a GREAT CORMORANT* on Lake Memphremagog and a Ruddy Duck on Retreat Meadows. Also in November, the vanguard of Northern Shrikes arrived, in what became one of the biggest invasions into the region in years, and last but not least was a CLAY-COLORED SPARROW* seen near the banding station (but not netted) in West Brattleboro.

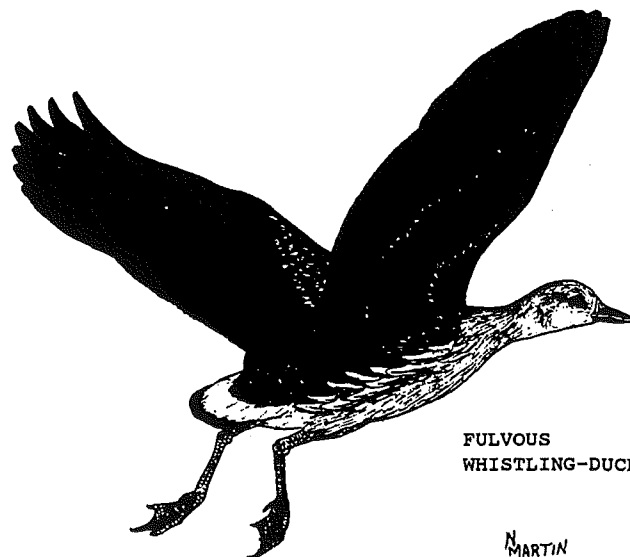
The total number of species reported to Records of Vermont Birds this fall is 242, a good number, above average. Trends as detailed by banders and hawkwatchers tended to be fairly positive with excellent days in October producing some station highs of warblers and sparrows, but noting the near absence of northern finches. An "unprecedented success" described the 1990 hawkwatch season, as stations were fully manned and records meticulously kept and published, providing a sound basis from which to measure future trends. Over 7800 raptors were tallied, the highest ever for Vermont and hopefully due to healthy populations as well as increased coverage. I look forward to subsequent falls and the ability to compare from year to year in this dynamic and exciting season.

*Consideration by the Vermont Birds Records Committee pending.

LOONS, GREBES AND HERONS

Only 5 Red-throated Loons were reported this autumn, this number a more average total for Lake Champlain (hereafter LC) than the unprecedented 26 birds found there in 1989. Three juv. were found on a lake survey on 10/27 between Charlotte and Bridport (WGE,NLM,RBL), 1 off Addison 11/3 (DLC) and 1 picked up on a road in Winoski and later euthanized due to trauma to the head or nervous system (JSe,SBM,VRC). Of the 402 Common Loons reported, 35 were on inland lakes, including 13 on Neal Pond, Lunenburg on 11/3 (RGY). A high count of 209 found on 11/20 included 105 from St. Albans Bay, 82 from Swanton and 22 from the Georgia area of LC (RBL, BLR,GEHa) representing a late peak although loons persisted on the lake through the fall period. Few reports of Pied-billed Grebe were received: a total of 15 with a high of 4 at Herricks Cove (hereafter HC) on 10/22 (DHC,WGE) and the latest reported from the Vernon area of the Connecticut River (hereafter CR) a single bird on 11/6 (JJC). Horned Grebe stayed in numbers on LC with 542 birds reported mostly in November, except the high total of 175 recorded on the lake 10/27 (WGE, NLM,RBL). Other notable counts were 79 in Shelburne on 11/1 (RBL) and 100 at Potash Bay on 11/9 (JAP). Although these grebes will stay on LC until freezeup, the last report for the period was 1 off Charlotte on 11/26 (MBN). The 2 on L. Hortonia, a small inland lake, 11/18 (RWP), may have been pushing their luck. The earliest of the 59 Red-necked Grebes reported were single birds around 9/20 and 9/21 on LC (CCR,JJC,RBL). A high of 15+ birds off Grand Isle was found 11/7 (DJH), and notable sightings away from LC were: up to 2 on L. Bomoseen 11/18 (CJF;RWP), 2 on L. St. Catherine on 11/14 (CCR) and 2 on 11/21 on Caspian L., Greensboro (FO). The only report of GREAT CORMORANT was of an imm. on L. Memphremagog with 7 Double-crests on 11/4 (DLC), the same location as last year's bird. It would appear that Double-crested Cormorants have increased significantly, but numbers reported do not reflect the total numbers on LC. Of the nearly 2000 reported, fully 1750 were seen on boat surveys between August and November (RBL, WGE,NLM). On 8/20 counts made around the major nest sites where large numbers of birds stage, revealed 670 around Young Isl. and another 380 near New York's Four Brothers Isl. Off the lake, 65 migrating over White River Jct. 9/3 (WGE,NLM,DHC), and 51 on the CR near Vernon 9/26 are significant (JJC). Single American Bittern reports came in August, September and October, the latest of the 4 sightings, a bird in Danby 10/19 (CJF). However, at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge (hereafter MNWR) estimates for the period were up to 25, and 10 for Least Bittern (JBG). There were no other reported sightings for the latter species. About 190 Great Blue Heron were reported by 31 observers from nearly every corner of the state. High counts were usually from Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area (hereafter DCWMA) in Addison and Panton, notably 30 on 8/5 (WGE,NLM), and 10 along LC north of Sandbar Wildlife Management Area (hereafter SWMA) to Maquam Bay on 9/29 (RBL,JJC,CCR). The last report was of a single bird in Manchester on 11/29 (SAC). Great Egret was widely reported this fall, perhaps in record numbers. The following breakdown of sightings is interesting: 2 along the Ottaquechee R. in Woodstock 8/4-8 (JPW,PAK, SBL), 1 on Miller Pond, Arlington from 8/8 through 9/20 (RSK,ERK;NS), 1 in Shoreham 8/11 (WGE,NLM), 2 in Brandon 8/15 (SSW), 1 at a beaver pond in Eden 8/10 (MR), 1 in Shaftsbury 8/11 (RSK), 1 in Quechee 8/15 (KRT), 1 in Georgia 8/20 (DG), 3 on 8/21 in Weybridge (IW), 1 on 9/3-5 in N. Pownal (DM), 1 on the Battenkill R., Manchester in September, a bird in the Panton area of DCWMA in August and October (same bird?) (CJF;JAP;CSS; GEHa;RWP;JS,CA) and finally 1 bird at MNWR in August (JBG). In contrast, Snowy Egret was reported only once on 8/19 along Route 2 in Plainfield (RWP,JS,CA) and not reported from Young Island where they have bred. One

well documented LITTLE BLUE HERON report was received, an adult in Manchester on 9/4 (SAC). Cattle Egret also breeds on Young Island where 11 were counted on 8/20 (WGE,RBL,NLM) and a high of 51 was counted in the Grand Isle area on 8/18 (DJH). Notable was 1 seen in Shaftsbury 8/12 (BCD), and the latest seen were 10 9/8 and 2 9/9 on Grand Isle (DJH). Green-backed Heron was well reported, although 30 of the 70 reported were estimated to be at MNWR in September. Highs of 5 at East Slang Ferrisburgh on 8/20 (JID,MCD) and between Williamstown and Berlin on 9/1 (WGE,NLM,LRB,DHC,TEJ) were significant, but the latest records were of injured birds: one found 10/24 along Tweed River, Pittsfield with a 10" stick through the abdomen, and one found in Rutland 11/15 after hitting a building, both sent to VRC but later died. Black-crowned Night-Heron was sighted only 7 times, except for an estimated 40 at MNWR for September (JBG), with a high of 10 at DCWMA 9/1 (WGE, NLM,LRB,DHC,TEJ), and the latest at the LaPlatte R. Marsh Shelburne, an imm. 10/6 (WGE et al.).



FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK

WATERFOWL

A duck hunter (MS) legally shot an adult female FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK at MNWR on 10/13 to provide a specimen record of the first confirmed occurrence of this bird in Vermont (JBG,JRL). Photographs are on file at VINS. Good numbers of TUNDRA SWANS were seen this fall, a total of perhaps 9 birds. Most exciting were 7 seen on Johnson Pond, Shrewsbury on 11/30, 4 ad. and 3 imm. (CY,LC,SJ) representing the high count. One bird seen at HC on 10/26 (LB,PH) may possibly be the same adult seen on the river near Bellows Falls between 11/8 and 11/30 (DHC;DC,MWB;SN,AMD). One GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE of the Greenland race seen with 9,000 snows at DCWMA on 10/11 (CJF) is the only report received of this rare migrant to Vermont. Snow Goose numbers fluctuated widely in Vermont this fall, but appear to set record high totals for the period. At MNWR estimates as high as 19,000 for late October were received (JBG). At DCWMA, many observers reported snows, with the earliest 20 on 9/30 (SSW), highs of 9,000 on 10/11 (CJF) and 10/26 (WJC), 7,500 on 10/12 (MBN) and 11/5 (FAP), and the latest 1,500 at the end of the period 11/30 (JAP). Notable migrants included 21 over VINS 10/1 (JMN), 50+ in East Montpelier 10/13 (NE), 30 over Marlboro 11/14 (JPN), 600 in Dorset 10/14 (EFG), 150 in White River Junction, 10/20 (NLM), 700 over Waterbury 10/26 (EK), 200 at Fuller Mt. Hawk Watch 10/26 (JID,MCD), single birds in Sheffield 10/25 (PFW, SAW) and Brattleboro 11/6 (JJC) and a high of 5,000 in Grand Isle 10/7 (RBL,DKL). Very remarkable but perhaps predictable with so many snows, was the first occurrence in New England of ROSS' GOOSE, first reported from DCWMA

on 10/27, an imm. at close range but in fading light, making photography unsuccessful (WGE,NLM). Subsequent observers reported a confusing array of ages and numbers. Detailed reports were received of an ad. on 10/29 (JAP) and an imm. on 11/25 (BMP). Reports of 2 on 11/4 and 1 ad. with 2 imm. on 10/30 were not accompanied by documentation. A total of over 32,000 Canada Geese was tallied for the period, most reports being of large flocks moving down LC and at DCWMA. A single high count of 6964 on LC 10/3 resulted from a Fish and Wildlife Department (hereafter VFWD) survey (WJC). Earliest movements were in the second week of September with 12 over Dorset (EFG), 14 over West Bolton (MC), 7 in Chester (CEAd), 20 in Winhall (WJN) and 14 over Grand Isle (DJH). Peak numbers in October included 4,000 at DCWMA (JRA, WJC) and 3600+ in Grand Isle (RBL, DKL), with geese remaining in the area through the period. Of the 3800 Wood Ducks reported, most were estimated at MNWR, with 600 to 850 reported between 8/31 and 10/4 (JBG) and on a LC survey 10/3 when 1324 were counted (WJC, VFWD). Latest sightings were of 14 in Brandon on 11/22 (SSW) and 1 at McCuen Slang 11/23 (JAP). Green-winged Teal numbers were up, with 2238 counted on the VFWD survey on 10/3 (WJC) and estimates as high as 1000 at MNWR on 10/4 (JBG). Birders located good numbers in the Dead Creek area, with 50 on 10/10 (CJF) and 36 on 10/28 (JJC). A few birds persisted through early November: 2 at Retreat Meadows, Brattleboro (JJC), 2 at Allen Brothers Marsh (hereafter ABM) (WJN) and 1 near DCWMA on 11/9 (MBN, JAP). American Black Duck numbers at MNWR were estimated at 350 8/6, 800 9/28 and 1800 10/4 (JBG) whereas the VFWD survey on 10/3 counted 2889 along LC (WJC). Again these numbers reflect the majority of ducks reported, as birders tallied only 480 additional birds. Counts in November included 50 at DCWMA 11/9 (MBN), 60 on L. St. Catherine 11/14 (CCR), 4 on L. Bomoseen 11/24 (RWP) and 4 still at DCWMA at the end of the period (JAP). Mallard sightings by birders totalled nearly 900 individuals, whereas VFWD surveys added 4503 more on LC 10/3 (WJC), and MNWR estimates added 1500 8/6, 4000 9/28 and 7000 on 10/4 (JBG) for a total of 17,715 birds counted for the period. November counts included 59 in Proctor 11/12 (RWP), 5 on L. Morey 11/20 (PFW, SAW) and 6 in Bridport 11/23 (JAP). Rarer in fall, Northern Pintail was reported by seven parties, highest estimates came from MNWR with 30 8/31, 100 9/28 and 150 10/9 (JBG), and 26 counted at DCWMA 10/11 (CJF). One was seen at DCWMA as late as 11/9 (MBN). Surveys accounted for nearly 600 Blue-winged Teal along LC between 8/6 and 10/3 (WJC, VFWD, JBG), and birders recorded highs of 25 8/1 (JAP) and 35 8/5 (WGE, NLM) at DCWMA, with the latest seen at DCWMA a single bird on 10/10 (CJF). Northern Shoveler at MNWR was estimated at 5 8/31, 10 8/28 and 50 on 10/25 (JBG), but was reported only 3 more times by birders: single birds at Springweather Nature Area on 9/13 (WJN), the mouth of the Ompompanoosuc R. Norwich on 11/17 (DHC) and Bellows Falls 11/24 (MWB, DC). Outside of MNWR, where Gadwall estimates were 100 9/28 and 30 10/4 (JBG), birders counted 24 more, 18 in the Champlain Islands (DJH), 1 in Springfield 9/13 (WJN), 1 at DCWMA 10/10 (CJF) and 4 at L. Bomoseen 11/18 and 11/25 (CJF). American Wigeon was estimated at 30 on 8/31, 100 9/28 and 250 10/4 at MNWR (JBG), and birders counted only 38 more between Grand Isle's 18 on 8/4 and 7 on 9/23 (DJH), 3 at Springweather Nature Area 9/25 (WJN) and Salisbury 10/5 (JAP), and DCWMA where 6 were the latest on 10/29 (JJC). Canvasback went nearly unnoticed, with reports of 2 on St. Albans Bay 11/3 (DLC) and 4 on the CR Vernon 11/6 (JJC), whereas there were no reports of Redhead. Ring-necked Duck numbers were healthy with an estimated high at MNWR of 12,620 on 10/29 (JBG) and 9,034 on LC 10/3 (WJC, VFWD). Later reports from birders included 34 on the CR near Vernon 11/6 (JJC), 102 on L. Bomoseen on 11/12 (RWP) and the last sighting of 10 at Prouty Beach, Newport 11/16 (PFW, SAW). Greater Scaup was low

with only 84 birds counted, a very early drake seen off Tromp's Point, Grand Isle 8/17 (DJH), a high of 27 at Button Bay 10/27 (WGE, RBL, NLM) and the latest 4 in Addison 11/23 (JAP) and 1 off Grand Isle 11/28 (DJH). The rarer Lesser Scaup was recorded 19 times in all, 10 were estimated at MNWR 10/25 (JBG) and birders found a few more into November with 3 seen on L. Bomoseen 11/7 (SSW) for the late record, and 2 in Quechee a week earlier (WGE). Three Oldsquaw were seen: 1 in Town Farm Bay Charlotte on 10/27 (WGE, NLM, RBL) and 2 in Swanton 11/10 (GEHa, BLR, RBL). Numbers of all three scoters were down, with 42 Black Scoters in total, 30 of them on L. Dunmore 10/10 (SSW) and the rest on LC seen between 10/27 and 11/3 at Shelburne, Ferrisburgh and Button Bay (RBL, DLC, WGE, NLM). There were fewer Surf Scoters; a total of 17 was seen in small flocks on LC, except for 4 on L. Dunmore 10/10 (SSW) and a high of 5 on 10/27 between Addison and Bridport (WGE, RBL). White-winged Scoter was more numerous; nearly 225 seen in October and early November. A high of 100 seen in Grand Isle on 10/7 (DJH), 44 in Shelburne Bay 10/10 (RBL) and 28 on L. Dunmore 10/10 (SSW) accounted for most sightings with a notable late report of 2 on 11/21 from Caspian L. Greensboro (FO). Common Goldeneye breeds in selected Vermont habitats and 128 were estimated at MNWR on 8/1 (JBG); most other reports of the 947 tallied were in November. A high count of 102 in Swanton on 11/10 (GEHa, RBL, BLR) was normal for LC, and in addition there were 40 on L. St. Catherine 11/14 (CCR), 25 on L. Bomoseen 11/18 (CJF), and 42 on L. Hortonia 11/24 (RWP). Barrow's Goldeneye usually appears a bit later, so 2 seen on northern lakes is noteworthy: 1 on L. Memphremagog 11/4 (DLC), and a drake on Caspian L., Greensboro 11/21 was present for a week (FO). Birders reported 124 Bufflehead and 20 more were estimated at MNWR 9/28 and 10/25 (JBG). Peak numbers were 39 in the Shelburne/Burlington area 11/1 (RBL), 21 on Danby Pond 11/18 (CJF), and 9 in Charlotte 11/21 and 11/27 (SSW, MBN). Good numbers of Hooded Mergansers came in, with a high of 60 in St. Albans Bay (DLC) and a peak of 60 estimated at MNWR around 10/30 (JBG). Of the total 375 sightings, L. Bomoseen held the highest numbers, with 45 11/18 (CJF), 40 11/20 (FAP) and 34 11/24 (RWP) - good consistent counts by 3 independent observers of presumably the same birds. One bird in Weybridge 11/30 was the late report (SSW). Common Merganser was scattered on LC through the period, with over 1850 birds counted. Notable were 400 on L. Memphremagog 11/21 (FO) and 72 on L. Pinneo, Quechee 11/29 (JMN). Normally much rarer, Red-breasted Merganser put in an astonishing appearance where 1500+ were counted in Addison 11/3 (DLC) and other scattered reports came in through mid-November including 40 in Grand Isle 11/3 (DJH), 12 in Shelburne 11/1 (RBG) and 2 in Charlotte for a late report 11/21 (SSW). The only Ruddy Duck report was of one at Retreat Meadows in Brattleboro on 11/10 (JJC).

VULTURES, HAWKS AND FALCONS

Turkey Vulture numbers increased in 1990, with 198 reported from hawk watches, and another 233 elsewhere. Highs were of 15 over New Haven 9/14 (JRA) and Salisbury (JAP), 14 at DCWMA 8/11 (WGE, NLM), 12 over West Haven 9/15 (FAP) and 11 at Orwell 9/24 (BWP) and DCWMA 10/17 (SSW), and the latest a remarkable 2 on 11/16 in Reading (FMH, GEH). Osprey was well reported, with 175 from hawkwatchers and another 70 by birders statewide, of no more than 3 at any time. The latest report was of 1 bird at Grand Isle 10/31 (RBL) (but see the Winter RVB). The exciting regularity of Bald Eagle in Vermont was again borne out, with 27 reported for the period, 12 from hawk watches, and 15 others scattered throughout the season. Hawk watches recorded 143 of the total 240 Northern Harriers, with most of the remaining birds (at least 60) seen at or near DCWMA by 11 observers. A high of 10 at DCWMA 11/11 (DLC) is notable, and the latest report was of 1 bird in the same area 11/30 (JAP).