

# BIRD SIGHTING REPORT

**SPECIES** Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)

**DATE** August 23-24, 2014; September 7, 2014 (Report written for August 23 sighting)

**NUMBER** One adult female

**LOCATION** Lake Champlain, Addison, Vermont; approximately one half mile northwest of the Champlain Bridge to New York. (44.0445° latitude, -73.4286° longitude.)

**CONDITIONS** This bird was observed on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain from about 4:30 to 7 p.m. at distances ranging from about 3/4 to 1 mile. (It had been observed and photographed earlier from about noon to 2:30 p.m. on the New York side of the lake from a distance of about 70 feet.) It settled on a large, green navigational buoy number 55, presumably for the night. The sky was clear, the wind mostly calm, the air temperature ranged from about 75 degrees to 65 degrees Fahrenheit and the water temperature was about 68 degrees Fahrenheit. The sun was to the left of and behind the observers. Observations were made with Zeiss 8x42 TFL binoculars, a Nikon 20-45x 60mm spotting scope and Celestron 8-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope alternately fitted with a Televue image erector and Celestron Plossl 26mm eyepiece (effective 78x magnification) and a Canon 400D digital camera, T-ring and T-adapter (effective 64x magnification) all mounted on a custom platform, Manfrotto 3066 video head, and Manfrotto 132XB heavy duty tripod. Atmospheric distortion was negligible. Overall viewing conditions were excellent.

**IDENTIFICATION** This large bird was about the size of a Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) and structured much like a Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) with long, pointed bill, long wedged tail, and long and lanky wings. Bill was pale fleshy pink with slight grayish shade on tip and light yellow base. Mandible edges were serrated with small “teeth” facing inward (see photos). Facial skin patch at base of lower mandible was light yellow. No feathering was in front of or below the gray eye. A small, dark gray triangular patch was in front of eye. All plumage above was brown, front of neck and breast were brown; belly, undertail and center of underwing white; flight feathers and leading edge of underside of wings brown. Legs and large, webbed feet were yellow. (See photos.)

**BEHAVIOR** This bird spent most of its time loafing on the rocky New York shoreline with a large group of mixed gulls. At one point it flew near the Vermont border, landed on the water and attempted to eat a large yellow perch. After about ten minutes it determined the fish was too large to swallow and relinquished the catch to a juvenile Herring Gull (which was begging at the booby for the fish). The bird returned to the rocks and periodically napped and preened. Later in the afternoon it was seen perched on the water in Vermont with a mixed group of gulls. It subsequently flew to a large navigational buoy which it was presumably using as an overnight roost.

**DISTINCTIONS** Overall structure and size distinguish as booby or gannet. Yellow bill, face and legs, and clearly defined brown breast distinguish from other similar species including juvenile Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*), juvenile Nazca Booby (*S. granti*) and juvenile Blue-footed Booby (*S. nebouxii*). Yellow face patch and overall plumage pattern distinguish as adult female.

**OBSERVERS** Theodore G. Murin, 77 Overlook Drive, South Burlington, VT 05403  
Allan Strong, South Burlington, VT

Don Clark, Grafton, VT

Beginner birder and U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice and son John Rice-Cameron

Various other observers (names unknown)

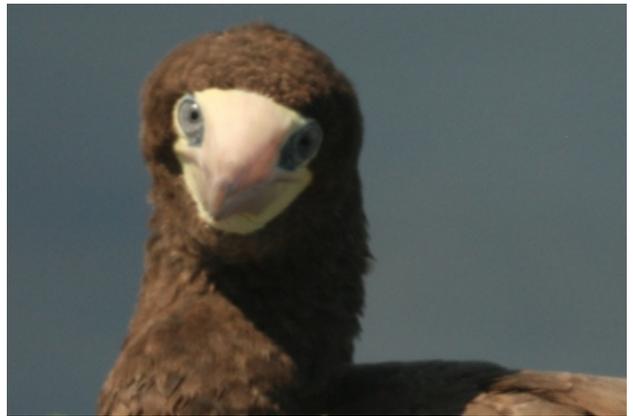
Seen independently in Vermont by many observers including Gary Chapin, Richard Lavallee and Jim Mead.

**NOTES**

This bird was initially discovered at this location by Gary Chapin of Ticonderoga, NY.

**PHOTOS**





**DATE OF REPORT** August 23, 2014; updated October 10, 2014 for additional sightings

**SIGNATURE**



**ADDENDUM**

Observed again August 24, 2014 on and around the same navigational buoy, periodically plunge-diving.

On September 7, 2014, an adult Brown Booby was observed from Charlotte Town Beach, Charlotte, Vermont on green navigational buoy number 47 approximately 3.5 miles to the north in Shelburne, Vermont (approximately 44.38° latitude, -73.30° longitude). The bird was seen in excellent viewing conditions and relatively calm seas with the Schmidt-Cassegrain scope described above. The bird eventually flew east out of sight, but reappeared shortly afterward. It was then observed for about an hour plunge-diving among flocks of Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) and resting on the water approximately 2 miles to the north of Charlotte Town Beach. The bird was observed and enjoyed by many. Its sex was not definitively determined, although it was presumed to be the same bird seen in Addison two weeks earlier.