

# PATAGONIA PICNIC IN MONTAUK

—or—

## HOW WE ALL GO BIRDING

Compiled by Patricia J. Lindsay, with contributions from Seth Ausubel, Andy Baldelli, Vicki Bustamante, Doug Futuyma, Doug Gochfeld, Shai Mitra, Bryan Pfeiffer, Sean Sime, and Angus Wilson

*The Patagonia Picnic Table Effect is a birding phenomenon named for a famous hotspot in southeast Arizona. As the Rose-throated Becards there drew more and more birders to the area, additional rarities and birds of interest continued to be discovered, attracting even more birders and resulting in even more discoveries. This same “Effect” played out in our own corner of the country this past fall and winter, in Montauk and surrounds, at the eastern tip of Long Island. The telling of how events unfolded is entertaining and instructive, and, perhaps most interesting, provides a glimpse into the motivations, expectations, and techniques of the many birders whose discoveries fill The Kingbird’s Regional Reports each season. The narratives presented here are more than a chronicle of ornithological events; they are also the story of how many of us approach our hobby in these early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.*

### **13 October, West Lake Drive      Patricia J. Lindsay, Bay Shore**

Woven throughout last fall’s run of rarities in Montauk were some longstanding personal relationships forged on the venerable Montauk Christmas Bird Count. When Andy Baldelli was cruising around Montauk on 13 October, he poked up West Lake Drive not only “to see if anything interesting is around,” as he likes to say, but also out of longtime habit: this was his former CBC territory, and, although he had not covered it formally in years, he knew its hotspots intimately. His intuition paid off when he found a yellow-bellied kingbird flycatching from a fence line along the road, gave it a quick look, and drove off, happy to have found the *Tyrannus* he hoped for—even expected—at this date and place. But something tickled his brain, something didn’t quite add up to Western Kingbird. This bird had an obviously deep gray breast and a contrasting white malar...and he hadn’t seen white in the outer tail. He turned around and went back to study it more carefully. Realizing he had something really special, he got on the cell phone and dialed one of his former colleagues from the old Lake West CBC party, Shai Mitra.

Shai and I were at the Fire Island Hawkwatch, meanwhile, enjoying a fine morning of birding, when the phone rang. Andy’s voice came through for a few seconds before the call was unceremoniously dropped. This happened a few more times, his voice vanishing abruptly into the ether, but not before we heard “...kingbird...not a Western...West Lake Drive.” Despairing of Montauk’s mysterious no-cell zone for the moment, we decided we’d better just get out there as fast as we could. We informed the birders at the watch, called the

**Warbling Vireo:** last CP 16 Sep.  
**Philadelphia Vireo:** APP 13 Sep (A&KO); CP 16 Sep (RA); RRes 22 Sep (JL); JBWE 24 Sep (JGi); RRes 2 Oct (JL).  
**Red-eyed Vireo:** last CHP 26 Oct.  
**Horned Lark:** small numbers reported from JBWE, Mtk, FBF from mid Nov thru.  
**Tree Swallow:** 10,000 JBWE 20 Sep; 10,000 Cedar Beach, T Babylon, SUFF 20 Oct; traditional gathering spots.  
**N. Rough-winged Swallow:** Jam Bay 3 Sep, unus date/loc.  
**CAVE SWALLOW:** RMSP 8 Nov (SSM!, DF); HHSP 23 Nov (AnW!); 4 MB 23 Nov (SBI!, D. Gochfeld!); JBWE 24 Nov (S. Billerman!, PD); BP 24 Nov (A. Lazarus, P. Pollack, J. Rabi), many.  
**Barn Swallow:** last 2 JBWE 15 Sep.  
**Red-breasted Nuthatch:** big irruption cont from summer; 30 RMSP 16 Sep; 25 RMSP 29 Sep; *intro*.  
**White-breasted Nuthatch:** 9 recorded from 4 coastal sites 29 Sep: 6 FT (SWA), "something of a fallout, although not unprecedented as a coastal migrant, it always feels a bit unusual to see them that way;" DOP (TP), "first time I've seen it there;" JBWE (TWB, GB); RMSP (PJL, SSM); many add'l records of smaller numbers on barrier beaches, e.g., 3 RMSP 14 Oct (PJL, SSM), thru 30 Oct.  
**Winter Wren:** arr JBWE & Mtk 29 Sep.  
**Golden-crowned Kinglet:** arr CP 24 Sep.  
**Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** arr CP 13 Sep.  
**E. Bluebird:** 40 Springs P, EH 27 Sep, 20 still present 3 Nov (KRu, BRu); last Camp Hero, Mtk 23 Nov (SBI).  
**Veery:** CP 5 Oct, getting late.  
**Gray-cheeked Thrush:** arr APP 13 Sep (A&KO); Northwest Woods EH 1 Oct (SH), last.  
**Swainson's Thrush:** arr Caleb Smith SP SUFF 2 Sep (JGl); 10 CHP 7 Sep (RV); last Gilgo SUFF 13 Oct (K&SF), late.  
**Hermit Thrush:** arr CP 9 Oct.  
**Wood Thrush:** last CP 24 Oct (MY).  
**Am. Robin:** 500 CHP 7 Sep (RV), many for date; 350 JBWE 8 Nov; 300+ CP 16 Nov.  
**European Starling:** 2000 migr RMSP 28 Nov.  
**Am. Pipit:** max 80 migr RMSP 28 Nov.  
**Cedar Waxwing:** 200 RMSP 29 Sep; 280 RMSP 14 Oct; 110 JBWE 16 Nov; 400 MLUA 28 Nov (RV).

## WARBLERS

**Golden-winged Warbler:** Amagansett SUFF 13 Sep (KRu, BRu).

**Blue-winged Warbler x Golden-winged Warbler:** CP 24 Sep (P. Post, mob) ph, closely resembled ad Golden-winged but with bright yellow chest.  
**Tennessee Warbler:** well and widely reported thru 14 Oct, perhaps related to Spruce Budworm increase to the north.  
**Orange-crowned Warbler:** 10-13 reported: RRes 22 Sep (JL, EM); CP 29 Sep; PP 30 Sep (J. Ascher); PP 9-10 Oct; CP 13 Oct (JS, EL, mob); FT 15 Oct (SSM, SBI, et al.); Mtk 21 Oct (AnW); CP 25 Oct; CCP 25 Oct (J&GF); KP 5 Nov (JL); Captree I SUFF 6 Nov (BB); JBWE 11 Nov (BF); Cedar Beach, T Babylon SUFF 12 Nov (JQ, PJL).  
**Nashville Warbler:** last CP 11 Nov.  
**N. Parula:** last KP 14 Oct.  
**Yellow Warbler:** last JBWE 16 Oct, late.  
**Chestnut-sided Warbler:** last JBWE 5 Oct.  
**Magnolia Warbler:** last KP 14 Oct.  
**Cap May Warbler:** well reported thru 9 Oct, perhaps related to Spruce Budworm increase to the north.  
**Black-throated Blue Warbler:** last KP 14 Oct.  
**Yellow-rumped Warbler:** good early Sep flight, cont from summer, e.g., JBWE 2 Sep.  
**Black-throated Green Warbler:** last CP 13 Oct.  
**Blackburnian Warbler:** last PP 23 Sep.  
**Yellow-throated Warbler:** Mtk 16 Sep (HMc), unus date.  
**Pine Warbler:** last JBWE 18 Nov.  
**Prairie Warbler:** last RMSP 19 Sep.  
**Palm Warbler:** 30 RMSP 21 Sep, all *palmarum*; 20 *palmarum* & 2 *hypochrysea* RMSP 14 Oct; last RMSP & PL 28 Nov.  
**Bay-breasted Warbler:** last JBWE 29 Sep.  
**Blackpoll Warbler:** last KP 17 Nov.  
**Black-and-white Warbler:** last CP 24 Oct.  
**Am. Redstart:** last RMSP 14 Oct.  
**Prothonotary Warbler:** Miller Field RICH 16 Sep (W&H Mones), scarce fall migr.  
**Worm-eating Warbler:** Amagansett SUFF 8 Sep (HMc); APP 30 Sep (PJL), late; scarce fall migr.  
**Ovenbird:** MP 23 Nov; downtown Brooklyn KINGS 28 Nov, both late.  
**N. Waterthrush:** last VCP 14 Oct.  
**Louisiana Waterthrush:** CP 1 Sep; CLP 8 Sep; only reports.  
**Kentucky Warbler:** m Jam Bay 23 Sep (K&SF), only report.  
**Connecticut Warbler:** 12 reports 1-29 Sep, easternmost loc Muttontown Pres NASS.  
**Mourning Warbler:** 4 reports: CP 1, 17 & 25 Sep, CHP 11 Sep.

Hollow, Montauk. This bird evaded our efforts to find it long enough to prompt a goose by goose examination of the entire neighborhood. During this search, my binoculars fell upon a Pink-footed Goose. This was of course very exciting, but the goose promptly disappeared from view, intensifying our excitement in a rather unpleasant way. While trying to relocate the Pink-foot, Pat found a Western-type kingbird, which also immediately disappeared. This engendered even more unpleasant excitement, as we were intensely aware that we needed to rule out Cassin's Kingbird, an example of which had been present recently just a couple of miles from where we were standing. A forced march to find additional vantages ensued. From the very most remote of these, I scoped the pasture and found an Ash-throated Flycatcher! Beyond anything resembling composure, I am reported to have said, "Pat, it would be very improbable to find an Ash-throat and a Western Kingbird at the same place and the same time." (For the record, she did not waver and ultimately was the first to re-find and positively identify the Western Kingbird.) It goes without saying that the Ash-throat quickly disappeared also, prompting a forced retreat back to our original vantages. Shocked, oxygen-deprived, and over-heated, I called in reinforcements. Gail Benson and Hugh McGuinness were relatively merciful in the sport they later made of these calls. It helped that all three birds cooperated. We eventually saw the Barnacle Goose, too, but it seems fortunate that we had such difficulty doing so at first.

## **22 November, Deep Hollow Ranch Sean Sime, Maplewood, NJ**

Recalling my run for the Pink-footed Goose and other Montauk specialties is quite easy. Barring the Southern Nassau CBC it was the last time I went birding in 2007.

From an avian standpoint 2007 could not have been any more different than 2006 for me. A new home in NJ (no comment), an expecting wife and an extended stay at the in-laws during an extended period of home renovation decimated my roughly 100 trips in 2006 to a paltry six in '07. So, under the guise of, "It's a holiday and I can't disturb the new neighbors with power tools" I made my Thanksgiving plan.

First hurdle was getting out of the house at the in-laws. I wanted to be in Montauk at first light so at 3:30 I was packed and heading for the door. I quickly encountered problem number one. The alarm was on. This just as quickly brought up problem number one, subset A. I didn't know the code. So after waking up my pregnant wife (I know, I know, I'm a horrible person), I was on my way.

It was still dark as I was pulling into Montauk so I parked in the overlook just past the ranch and waited for the sun to come up. In the many birding trips I've begun in the predawn hours, I always wonder aloud what the first bird of the day will be. Guessing Mourning Dove is like betting red or black in craps. My dormant intuition had me playing it safe. I laughed to myself when the first bird of the day was a Woodcock slowly lumbering over my car silhouetted against the gray sky. Next were a pair of Woodcock chasing each other over the parking

**Bald Eagle:** 2 FIHW 5 Sep, 2 FIHW 7 Oct, 13 Oct, & 16 Oct, seasonal record high 6 for loc where rare; other reports: 9 CP 1 Sep-25 Oct; 8 w LI and RICH 2 Sep-8 Nov; 3-4 e LI 13 Oct-19 Nov; JBWE 28 Oct (SyS).  
**N. Harrier:** 168 FIHW 29 Sep, record high; total 429 FIHW season, also a record.  
**Sharp-shinned Hawk:** total 304 FIHW season.  
**Cooper's Hawk:** total 38 FIHW season, high.  
**N. Goshawk:** f OMNSA NASS 16 Sep (S. Janko); imm PP 19 – 28 Nov (SWh, mob).  
**Red-shouldered Hawk:** Miller Field RICH 16 Sep (W&H Mones); FBF 28 Oct (AnW); Crookes Pt RICH 11 Nov (CB); CP 16 Nov (TF).  
**Broad-winged Hawk:** 4 FT 29 Sep, uncommon on LI; 35 CP 29 Sep.  
**Rough-legged Hawk:** Mtk 17 Nov (VB).  
**Am. Kestrel:** 298 FIHW 29 Sep; total 731 FIHW season.  
**Merlin:** 319 FIHW 29 Sep, record one-day total; total 1487, high.  
**Peregrine Falcon:** 41 FIHW 7 Oct; total 236 FIHW, high.  
**Sora:** Jam Bay East Pd 12 Sep & West Pd 14 Sep, cont from summer?; CCP 6 Oct (J&GF, JQ), unus date and loc.  
**Com. Moorhen:** River Rd RICH 8 Sep.  
**American Coot:** 50 Jam Bay 17 Nov.  
**Black-bellied Plover:** 1000 JBWE 2 Sep.  
**Am. Golden-Plover:** arr Riv sod fields 1 Sep; max 17 Riv sod fields 18 Sep; 8 MB 21 Oct; widespread reports of singles from other locs to 28 Oct.  
**Semipalmated Plover:** 200 JBSP 1 Sep  
**Piping Plover:** Sagg 20 Oct (AnW), late.  
**Killdeer:** max 75-100 Riv sod fields 9-18 Sep.  
**Am. Oystercatcher:** 150 Shinn 1 Sep; 300 JBWE 13 Nov, 200+ remained thru.  
**Am. Avocet:** Jam Bay 15-25 Sep (LS ph, mob) & same or another intermittently 6-28 Oct.  
**Lesser Yellowlegs:** MB 23 Nov (SBl, D. Gochfeld), late.  
**Solitary Sandpiper:** Jam Bay 1 Sep (RJK), unus loc; 2 lingered at CP to 27 Oct, late.  
**Willet:** 6 *semipalmatus* MI 3 Sep, late for so many; 49 *inornatus* & 2 *semipalmatus* JBWE 15 Sep.  
**Upland Sandpiper:** Jam Bay 3 Sep (PjL, SSM, SWa), unus loc, only report.  
**Hudsonian Godwit:** 2 ads Jam Bay 1-16 Sep cont from summer, 1 remained to 18 Sep; ad JBWE 14-15 Sep.

**Marbled Godwit:** Jam Bay 8 Sep (M. Mayer).  
**Red Knot:** 250 JBWE 15 Sep.  
**Western Sandpiper:** bas ind cont from summer CCP thru 3 Sep; 10 Jam Bay 12 Sep (P. Post, T. Lundqvist); up to 20 Jam Bay 23 Sep; 15+ JBWE 4 Oct (B. Fogarty).  
**White-rumped Sandpiper:** 25 Jam Bay 3 Sep.  
**Baird's Sandpiper:** 1-2 inds Jam Bay 1-3, 8, 17, 23, 24 Sep; FBF 2 Sep; 1-2 JBWE 2, 10-15 Sep; 2 Riv sod fields 9-13 Sep; MB 23 Sep; JBWE 20 Oct (KO'L), late; Mtk horse farm 21 Oct (AnW).  
**Pectoral Sandpiper:** 20 MB 23 Sep; 2 Captree SP SUFF 6 Nov, getting late.  
**Stilt Sandpiper:** 25 Jam Bay 12 Sep (P. Post, T. Lundqvist); last Jam Bay 6 Oct (J. Borker).  
**Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** 1-7 JBWE 1 Sep-1 Oct; max 37 Riv sod fields 2-19 Sep; 2-3 Miller Field RICH 13-16 Sep (CH, mob), unus loc; JBWE 11 Oct (J&GF); JBWE 20 Oct (KO'L), late; well reported from other sod fields in mid SUFF.  
**Long-billed Dowitcher:** juv 11 Sep (KF), ad 15 Sep & juv 18 Sep JBWE, unus loc; Jam Bay East Pd 8, 12 Sep; 3 Jam Bay West Pd 16 Sep (J. Ask, KL *et al*); 16 Mass 16 Oct, more than usual at this wintering spot.  
**Wilson's Phalarope:** 3 Jam Bay 6 Sep, cont from summer; last 2 Jam Bay 8-9 Sep.  
**Red-necked Phalarope:** juv Jam Bay 1-14 Sep, cont from summer, increased to two 15 Sep and three (all juvs) 16-17 Sep, last two 18 Sep; PP 12 Sep (RJ).  
**Laughing Gull:** at least 1000 OP 19 Oct (HMc); 1250 FT 28 Oct (CW); 3000+ Accabonac Harbor, EH 3 Nov, associated with tropical storm Noel. These plus large numbers found in other sheltered spots in EH and Mtk totaled >5000 for the day (AnW); 1500-2000 Ditch Plains, Mtk 18 Nov (AnW).  
**FRANKLIN'S GULL (R10):** 1W FT 28 Oct (CW!).  
**Little Gull:** ad L Montauk In SUFF 28 Nov (VB).  
**Black-headed Gull:** 1W L Montauk In SUFF 24 Nov (MC).  
**Bonaparte's Gull:** arr 2 RMSP 18 Oct (KF); 464 Fort Pond Bay, Mtk 21 Nov (AnW).  
**Herring Gull:** 3000 PL 28 Nov.  
**Iceland Gull:** near ad Ditch Plains, Mtk 18 Nov (AnW); 1Y MP 23 Nov (MA, S. Billerman); 2 L Montauk In SUFF 24 Nov

I ran into Seth Ausabel, Isaac Grant and another fellow whose name escapes me (but whose disdain for rarity sightings being kept quiet I can still hear today). I remember him being terribly upset more people didn't get to see an Anna's Hummingbird frequenting a private residence upstate.

Did I mention listing is a cancer?

We decided to play the odds, exchange cell numbers and split up. Seth and the others were going to check an area nearby and I would stay put. I cringe thinking back to the days when a sighting was only learned about at the end of the day when somebody called you on the land line. What seemed like moments later the phone rang. "We got the bird!" Off I went. The Pink-footed Goose was feeding with maybe 75 geese within a private community, but visible from a public road outside the gate. The views were distant, but good. Not five minutes later the geese looked up at the sky, craned their necks in unison, froze, then took off towards the north end of the ranch.

The four of us decided to try our luck from Teddy Roosevelt again. We found a vantage point which allowed views of a second feeding station and pond. The Pink-footed was leisurely strolling about, albeit 200 yards away. I quickly noticed a bird flycatching near the geese. It was briefly out of view, but then came up on a fencepost. My binocular view suggested Western Kingbird. Seth's scope view confirmed it. While Seth was calling others on his phone I noticed a second flycatcher as Isaac was simultaneously commenting he was hearing crossbills.

I'm thinking clean sweep at this point. Ahh the possibilities! Only problem was the second flycatcher looked like another Western Kingbird. Only one had been reported from the area, but once again Seth's scope confirmed what my binoculars suggested. I can't remember who visually confirmed the Red Crossbills, but at this point we were all hearing them and eventually enjoyed scope views of many birds to our north.

Euphoria eased into contentment and as the caffeine wore off contentment came to rest as a big sigh of relief.

I spent the drive back to New Jersey in horrible traffic. The only time I smiled was when I wondered how miserable I would have been if I didn't see any of the rarities. Alas, after a long, great day of looking at birds there really is nothing like eating one. I trudged through the door at the in-laws to a beautiful turkey waiting for me.

I have many things to be thankful for; a healthy baby girl (are there age restrictions for NYSARC reports?), a loving family, not to mention a wonderful network of birding friends, but on that Thanksgiving I was most thankful for one thing. I didn't miss it.

### **23 November, Montauk to Mecox      Doug Gochfeld, Brooklyn**

*After seeing the Barnacle Goose in Rusty's field and the Clay-colored Sparrow on the path at the Deep Hollow Ranch, Shane Blodgett and Doug Gochfeld*

## CONTRIBUTORS

Bob Adamo, Mike Anderson, Richard Aracil, John Ascher, John Askildsen, Seth Ausubel, Andy Baldelli, Catherine Barron, Leslie Beebe, Gail Benson, Sue & Jim Benson, Steve Biasetti, Shawn Billerman, Orhan Birol, Shane Blodgett, Brent Bomkamp, Joe Borker, Thomas Brown, Thomas W. Burke, Vicki Bustamante, Ben Cacace, Roberto Cavalieros, Ralph Ciofi, Terry Clarke, Jim Clinton, Sr., Dave Compton, Mike Cooper, Steve D'Amato, Nicole Delacretaz, Peter Dorosh, Dave Eib, Mary Eyster, Mike Farina, Ed Feeley, Ken & Sue Feustel, Corey Finger, Tom Fiore, Howard Fischer, Brendan Fogarty, Louise Frazza, John & Gerta Fritz, Doug Futuyma, Yolanda Garcia, Paul Gillen, Joe Giunta, John Gluth, Douglas Gochfeld, Diane Gorodnitzki, Robert Grover, Martha Grutchfield, Christine Guarino, Dennis Guiney, Paul Guris, Andy Guthrie, Cliff Hagen, Nick Hamblet, Dan Heglund, Joel & Peg Horman, Sandra Hunter, Steve Janko, Sam Jannazzo, Phil Jeffrey, Rob Jett, Ed Johnson, Patrick Jones, David Jordet, Dave Klauber, Kathryn Klecan, C. Klein, Robert J. Kurtz, Tony Lance, Anthony J. Lauro, Anne Lazarus, Patricia J. Lindsay, Kirsten Lewis, Jean Loscalzo, Tomas Lundqvist, Michael Mayer, Hugh McGuinness, Jack Meyer, Eric Miller, Shai S. Mitra, Wayne & Holly Mones, Andy Murphy, Steve Nanz, David Narins, Katie Notopoulos, Bruce Nussbaum, Phillip O'Brien, Kevin O'Leary, Jim Osterlund, Al & Karin Ott, Jack Passie, Robert O. Paxton, Sarah Plimpton, Pat Pollack, Peter Post, Tom Preston, Joan Quinlan, Judy Rabi, Miriam Rakowski, Don Riepe, Robert Rossetti, Barbara Rubinstein, Karen Rubinstein, Starr Saphir, Mike Scheibel, Steve Schellenger, Sy Schiff, Eileen Schwinn, Pete Shen, Sean Sime, Dave Speiser, Lloyd Spitalnik, Rex & Birgit Stanford, Howie Stillman, Junco Suzuki, Joe Trezza, Mike Troyan, Kenton van Boer, Richard Veit, Cal Vornberger, Nick Wagerik, Kristine Wallstrom, Steve Walter, Scott Whittle, Rich Willot, Alex Wilson, Angus Wilson, Al Wollin, Seth Wollney, Chris Wood. Matt Young.

## ABBREVIATIONS

1W – 1st winter plumage; 1Y – 1st year plumage; APP – Alley Pond P QUEE; bas – basic plumage; BNL – Brookhaven National Laboratory, T Brookhaven SUFF; BP – Breezy Pt QUEE; CCP – Cupsogue County P SUFF; CHP – Conference House P RICH; CLP – Clove Lakes P RICH; CP – Central P NEWY; DHR – Deep Hollow Ranch, Montauk SUFF; DOP – Dreier Offerman P KINGS; EH – East Hampton SUFF; FBF – Floyd Bennett Field KING; FIHW – Fire Is Hawkwatch at RMSP Field 5, SUFF; FT – Fort Tilden QUEE; GKP – Great Kills P RICH; Grumman – former Grumman property, Calverton SUFF; HHSP -- Hither Hills SP SUFF; JBSP – Jones Beach SP NASS; JBWE – Jones Beach SP West End NASS; Jam Bay – Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge QUEE/KING; KP – Kissena P QUEE; LI – Long Island; MB – Mecox Bay SUFF; MI – Moriches In SUFF; migr – migrant, migrating; MLUA – Mt Loretto Unique Area RICH; MP – Montauk Pt SUFF; Mtk – Montauk, T EH SUFF;

look at the fourth bird, before it too disappeared out of sight over the ocean.

An amazing (and exhausting) day out east!

### **23 November, Hither Hills State Park & 24 November, Montauk Dump Angus Wilson, New York City and Springs, East Hampton**

While most visiting birders were content with the avian riches in the Deep Hollow valley, Rita's horse farm and Montauk Point, I couldn't help thinking that additional rarities might lurk in the other areas of good habitat on the eastern tip of the South Fork. Here are two brief vignettes from one weekend that bring home this point.

Throughout the season, I'd been popping into the parking lot above the campgrounds at Hither Hills State Park just west of Montauk, a raised vantage point that offers good views along the beach towards Napeague, the sandy isthmus that separates Montauk from the rest of Long Island. This accessible area has scattered vegetation that often holds migrant landbirds. On the morning of 23 November I was greeted by clear blue skies and a steady northwest wind that had been pushing throughout the night. Ideal conditions, I thought, to sweep migrants across the Sound onto the eastern end of Long Island. Some newly arrived American Tree Sparrows and Snow Buntings were scratching around the abandoned camp sites and a huge congregation of Northern Gannets and Laughing Gulls were feeding over schooling fish.

As I walked over the narrow dune onto the beach to watch the frenzy, I noticed a small bird flitting towards me down the beach. After a moment of puzzlement, I realized this was a tiny swallow and immediately snapped my binoculars onto it. I could see that the throat was brick red as was the forehead, with a dark band separating the two like a miniature mask of Zorro. As the swallow sped past, I also noted the dark back, square rump patch of a similar color to the throat and the short, squared tail - CAVE SWALLOW! As the bird headed west down the dunes, I dialed Hugh McGuinness who picked up almost instantly. "OK, what have you got?" he asked knowingly. It was gratifying to learn that later that day, he and others were to see several Cave Swallows at Mecox, 18.5 miles to the southwest. No doubt these were part of the same incursion but unfortunately, disappeared as quickly as they had arrived.

The next day, I repeated my tour of potential migrant traps en route to Deep Hollow, this time checking the former Montauk town dump. The landfill has been capped and is covered by waist high grass, but it offers a magnificent view across Block Island Sound and has a rich history as a vagrant trap. After only a few minutes walking through the grass, I heard an unfamiliar "Widit" call and looked up to see a Western Kingbird fly over my head and perch briefly on the boundary fence. Ah ha! Vindication! With two in Deep Hollow and a third I had spotted hawking insects in the yard of the Ranger Housing at Montauk Point, it seemed reasonable to count this as a remarkable fourth Western Kingbird in Montauk.

memories of 1995, 1997, and 1999, prompted SSM to predict five correlated phenomena: 1) a notable irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches during the fall; 2) a pulse of mid-summer molt-migrants, representing forest-breeding Neotropical migrants; 3) a larger than usual Labor Day flight of Myrtle Warblers, including birds that had not finished molting (this late Aug-early Sep flight is discrete from the "normal" arrival of fresh-plumaged birds that commences in late September); 4) a larger than usual Labor Day flight of Purple Finches (again, a phenomenon distinct from the regular Oct-Nov flights); and 5) a larger than usual coastal flight of "resident" woodland breeders: Downy and Hairy woodpeckers, Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, and White-breasted Nuthatch.

Predictions 1 and 3-5 were verified with robust evidence. Even #2 was supported to some extent by a molt-migrant Worm-eating Warbler at Fort Tilden and a mid-summer Blackpoll Warbler in Prospect Park. The correlation of all these events involving such disparate birds suggests a regional mechanism relating to climate or whole ecological communities. In the past, these kinds of flights have tended to occur during and after dry summers in the interior.

Considering the more strictly boreal species, we read this season's forecasts by Ron Pittaway (Ontario) and Matt Young (central New York State) with great interest. Their analyses, based on detailed data concerning the abundance and distribution of particular food sources, predicted some of the fall's events very well, especially in their target regions of southern Ontario and central New York State. But these forecasts didn't really prepare us coastal observers for the series of events we observed this fall on Fire Island: our first redpolls in late October, a White-winged Crossbill on 4 November, and the first of what would be many Red Crossbills on 5 November, but a complete absence of Pine Grosbeak and no Bohemian Waxwings or Evening Grosbeaks until December, and very few even then. Although 2007 may have seen the earliest and biggest incursion ever for Bohemian Waxwings in the northeastern United States, the Pine Grosbeak flight never equaled several recent flights from a few decades ago, when flocks reached Fire Island and Block Island. From a coastal perspective, the Evening Grosbeak flight was absolutely paltry compared with what was routine here just a couple of decades ago. The Pine Siskin flight was heavy, but never rivaled that of 1999, when counts exceeded 1,000 per day at Fire Island. The redpoll flight was earlier and heavier than most years, comparable to 93-94, 97-98, 99-00, and 01-02. The main (October-November) Purple Finch flight was about normal for a good year; what was more unusual was the magnitude of the late August-early September pulse. Both crossbills, although receiving little attention ahead of time, showed better than usual along the coast, where they are usually completely absent. But numbers can't be compared with the big flights of 97-98 and 99-00 and various big flights from the late 60's and early 70's.

Another area in which this fall excelled involved vagrants. At Montauk, a version of the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect played out *ad absurdum* from 13 October right through to the CBC, an account of which appears elsewhere in this issue. A few years after discerning the state's first Pacific Golden-Plover, Andy Baldelli's keen eye added another bird to the state list: a stunning **Cassin's**

not find my main quarry. At about 1:30, as the arrival of a front brought strong, cold winds from the northwest, I encountered Jimmy Woodward and Nealand Hill, visiting from Oklahoma City, at Third House in Teddy Roosevelt County Park. They had seen the Pink-footed that morning to the north of Third House, but were desperately searching for the Barnacle Goose. I told them where I had seen it hours before, and they, in turn, accompanied me to a rise from which we could see an obscured dark-headed goose close to where they had seen the Pink-footed. I guessed that it might be better visible from the hilltop in Startop Estates (it was not, in the event), so I drove there and followed a trail of trodden grass uphill, in what I thought was public (or at least not signed) property.

There I found the Barnacle Goose still in place, even as the Oklahomans arrived below, so I waved them up to join me. As they (visually) devoured the goose, a bird alighted on a railing about 70 yards away. I was astonished to see in my telescope a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, apparently an immature with an only moderately long tail. It was all I could do to turn the visitors' attention from the Barnacle Goose to a bird they can see daily in season at home, but I wanted other observers to corroborate this sighting, should the bird not be seen again. Almost as soon as they got on the bird and confirmed it, the owner of the property drove in and vehemently let us know that we were trespassing, so we reluctantly descended to the road and had a distressingly brief study of the now considerably more distant flycatcher before it disappeared behind a hedgerow (just where we had been standing!). Moments later, Vicki Bustamante, whom I had called, arrived from her nearby home, but the bird did not reappear in the next 20 minutes while we waited together from this lower vantage point. I departed with mixed feelings of elation at having spotted a notable bird (my first Scissor-tailed Flycatcher for the state) and anxiety that it might not be seen by other New York birders. Happily, Hugh McGuinness saw the flycatcher early the next morning, as did many other people through 14 December.

**15 Dec, Amagansett      Bryan Pfeiffer, Plainfield, Vermont**

Minutes before finding a Least Flycatcher on the Mountauk Christmas Count, I was thinking about The Pig. A landmark on the count, The Pig lived in a pen near the Amagansett train station. Over the years we would often find decent birds near The Pig: Brown Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Chipping Sparrow, for example.

The Pig was gone in 2007. But a nice bird was there nevertheless: Least Flycatcher. At first only an *Empidonax* species, a better find had fluttered in my imagination. Its short primary projection was obvious. Its bill, at first glance, seemed small and narrow. Satisfied that the bird itself was satisfied, actively feeding along a hedgerow and unlikely to go anywhere, I called Hugh McGuinness and told him to stop at the car and haul along my camera gear.

Yet even before Hugh and other birders arrived, my visions of Dusky Flycatcher or a "Western" Flycatcher had faded. A better look at the bill, eye-ring, throat and other plumage made it clear this individual was a Least Flycatcher. Not a huge discovery, but I was happy nonetheless to have

**White-throated Sparrow:** arr 24 Sep.  
**White-crowned Sparrow:** 10 LNP 13 Oct;  
15 MC 16 Oct; 23 Bowdoin Pk,  
Poughkeepsie 7 Nov; many scattered  
reports, more than typical.  
**Dark-eyed Junco:** arr 15 Oct.  
**Snow Bunting:** Hook Mt 28,29 Oct; 3  
Piermont Pier 4 Nov; 20 LaGrangeville 8  
Nov; 12 Nyack 10 Nov; EGR 12,28 Nov; 5  
LNP 14 Oct; 2 Neversink 18 Nov; 2 CPP 17  
Nov.  
**Red-winged Blackbird:** 1000 MC 5 Nov.  
**Rusty Blackbird:** 2 MC 29 Oct; 6 MC 5  
Nov.  
**Com. Grackle:** 1000 MC 8 Nov.  
**Boat-tailed Grackle:** MC 13, 25 Sep (TB).  
**Pine Grosbeak:** 8 Neversink 17 Nov; 12  
Neversink 18 Nov (LV); 9 Parksville 19  
Nov (JH,ABo).

**White-winged Crossbill:** Clinton Corners  
13,14 Oct (ABu).  
**Red Crossbill:** Parksville 19 Nov.  
**Com. Redpoll:** 50 Neversink 18 Nov; 150  
Claryville 19 Nov; Rhinebeck 30 Nov.  
**Pine Siskin:** scattered report starting third  
week of Sep; 14 Bashkill 27 Oct; 13  
Ardsley 16 Nov; 10 Claryville 19 Nov.  
**Am. Goldfinch:** 200 MC 5 Nov.  
**Evening Grosbeak:** 23 Summitville Hawk  
Watch 28 Oct; 2 Tuxedo 28 Oct; 12  
Millbrook 3 Nov; Rye Brook 4 Nov; 40  
Neversink 18 Nov; 2 ROCK 16 Nov.

(973) 252-2712 (work) (914) 237-9331 (h)  
E-mail: BochnikM@cs.com

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## REGION 10—MARINE

**Patricia J. Lindsay**

28 Mystic Circle, Bay Shore, NY 11706  
pjlindsay@optonline.net

**S. S. Mitra**

Biology Department, College Staten Island,  
2800 Victory Blvd., Staten Island, NY 10314  
mitra@mail.csi.cuny.edu

September's mean temperature at Islip was 67.2°F, 1.4° above normal. Central Park hit 88° on the 8th, and high temperatures were recorded at Islip on the 26th (79°) and 29th (78°). Precipitation totaled 1.3", 2.08" below normal. For October, the mean temperature at Islip was 61.1°, a substantial 6.8° above normal; similarly, Central Park's 63.6° mean was 7.0° higher than normal. A recording of 88° at Islip on the 8th set a new monthly record. November's mean temperature was 43.0°, 1.9° lower than the long-term average. Precipitation totaling 3.21" was 0.65" less than usual. Tropical Storm Noel traveled up the eastern US seaboard, reaching us on 3 November. Long Island escaped major damage but was buffeted by 40 mph gusts from the NNE (higher winds were recorded offshore) and heavy rain. Seawatching from the South Shore was disappointing; however, storm-related birds recorded by Angus Wilson from north facing vantages and from sheltered ponds on the south fork included approximately 5000 Laughing Gulls, 26 Bonaparte's Gulls, and 2 Forster's Terns.

and more. The compilation was rivetting as news of the day's successes and failures (mostly successes), as well as the perennial cloak and dagger intrigues of inter-party poachings, were revealed, and this unique season was concluded with an impressive tally of 135 species. Also striking was this season's sense of collective enterprise, which although always a central merit of the CBCs, was unusually rich this year—something I hope these interwoven narratives express.

