

## REPORT OF THE NEW YORK STATE AVIAN RECORDS COMMITTEE FOR 2012

The New York State Avian Records Committee (hereafter “NYSARC” or the “Committee”) reviewed 207 reports from 2012 involving 119 separate sightings and 10 reports from previous years involving 10 sightings. Reports were received from 31 of the 62 counties in New York State (NYS) as well as from the newly created pelagic region, which covers all of the New York State waters 3 miles from shore and beyond. A high percentage of reports came with helpful photographs, which definitely facilitates the review process and greatly enhances the value of the NYSARC archive. **The Committee reminds readers that reports submitted to eBird, the listserves, local bird clubs, rare bird alerts (RBAs) and even *The Kingbird* Regional Editors are generally not passed along to NYSARC.** Doing so, therefore, remains the responsibility of the observer(s). When possible, the submission of multiple independent reports from co-observers is encouraged, as this provides a much fuller documentation of the sighting and can increase the likelihood of acceptance. ALL observers, not just the finder, are urged to submit written reports and/or photographs. The names of the 107 people who contributed materials (written reports, photographs and sketches) are listed alongside accepted reports and again at the end of this document. Where possible, the name(s) of the original finder(s) is (are) included in the narratives. Production of this Annual Report is a team effort. In addition to the contributors referenced above, several *Kingbird* Regional Editors have helped observers to prepare and submit documentation.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The current Committee extends a special thank you to recent voting members Tom Johnson and Jeff Bolsinger for their help in evaluating a number of 2012 reports that were selected for Accelerated Review. The Committee also wishes to thank new member Chris Wood for arranging and hosting the daylong NYSARC Annual Meeting held on 7 Dec 2013 at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in Ithaca.

### HOW TO SUBMIT REPORTS

Advice on report preparation and submission is provided on the NYSOA web site: <http://nybirds.org/NYSARC/index.htm>

Here, a list of species requested for review by NYSARC (The Review List) is provided along with illustrated copies of previous annual reports. Readers are reminded that, when possible, reports of potential new species are now reviewed ahead of the main body of reports so that a decision can be rendered and made public as soon as possible. This new Accelerated Review policy (NYSARC 2009, *The Kingbird* 59(3):235) benefits everyone but relies on timely receipt of

the documentation. To ensure the continued success of this endeavor, the Committee encourages observers to provide materials, especially those concerning major rarities, as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. The Committee is grateful to Carena Pooth (NYSOA Web Master) for regularly updating and improving the NYSARC web site. An on-line reporting form allows observers to compose a written report and attach up to five digital image files. Documentation (written reports and photographs) and any other correspondence for the Committee can also be sent via email or regular mail to:

Gary Chapin  
125 Pine Springs Drive, Ticonderoga, NY 12883  
E-mail: nysarc44@nybirds.org

## HIGHLIGHTS

Once again it is gratifying to see that 2012 provided yet another outstanding year of birding across New York State. Chief among the highlights were three additions to the NYS avifauna, **Fea's/Zino's Petrel** (*Pterodroma feae/madeira*), **Virginia's Warbler** (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) and **Grace's Warbler** (*Setophaga graciae*). Also noteworthy were three **Northern Lapwings** (*Vanellus vanellus*), part of an historic incursion into eastern North America, a second state record of **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch** (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*) and a fourth state record of **Yellow-billed Loon** (*Gavia adamsii*). Honorable mentions also go to four separate **Swallow-tailed Kite** (*Elanoides forficatus*) sightings and a **Ross's Gull** (*Rhodostethia rosea*) on Cayuga Lake. Including the additions mentioned above, the NYS Avian Checklist now stands at 485 species or unique species pairs.

## COMMITTEE NEWS

The Committee welcomes two new members, Chris Wood and Doug Gochfeld, who replaced Tom Johnson and Jeff Bolsinger at the ends of their three-year terms. Chris and Doug are both well-known figures on the national and international birding stage through their work with eBird, as field observers and as guides for leading birding tour companies. Their deep knowledge of field identification and distribution along with an expansive network of personal connections with the birding community both far and wide will be an asset to the Committee.

## 2012 Reports Accepted

### **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

**2012-51-A/C** One, Spicer Bay, Clayton, **Jefferson**, 23-24 Jul (Brenda Best, Jeff Bolsinger, David Wheeler, ph B. Best, J. Bolsinger, D. Wheeler)

A single Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was found at Spicer Bay by Nancy Powers on 2 Jul and was first identified by Bill Monroe on 20 Jul. The bird fed

on cracked corn with Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) at the home of Richard and Nancy Powers. It was apparently last recorded by birders on 30 Jul (Kim Hartquist, eBird S11242154). What is presumed to be the same bird was subsequently shot by a hunter on nearby Grindstone Island during the first week of Nov (Dick Brouse, pers. comm. to Jeff Bolsinger). While records of extralimital waterfowl, and Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in particular, are often clouded with uncertainty, the arrival of this bird coincides with that of individuals in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Ohio and Kentucky, hinting at a dispersal from their normal range. Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is also known for acclimating to areas where food is plentiful, including around human habitation. While 100% certainty on origin is perhaps impossible, the Committee believed this bird most likely represented a natural vagrant and voted to accept it as such. This furnishes NY with its 7th accepted record, all of which have been since 2010.

**Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*)**

**2012-10-A/B** One, Holtsville & Riverhead, **Suffolk**, 27 Jan & 21-22 Feb (Derek Rogers, Peter Priolo, ph D. Rogers, P. Priolo)

**2012-48-A** One, Alley Restoration Area by the Cross Island Parkway, **Queens**, 25 Jan (Andrew Baksh, ph A. Baksh)

Pink-footed Goose has become annual in the Northeast and nearly annual in NY. Since the first accepted record Nov-Dec 2007, the species has been found in NY every winter except 2010-2011. Both sightings the Committee reviewed were from the stronghold of occurrence, Long Island and the NYC area, and were well documented and accompanied by diagnostic photographs. Each record falls well within the established pattern of vagrancy, and no Committee member expressed concern over origin. These occurrences provide NYS with its 6th and 7th records.

**“Black” Brant (*Branta bernicla nigricans*)**

**2012-3-A** One, Floyd Bennett Field, **Kings**, 5 Jan (Doug Gochfeld, ph D. Gochfeld)

**2012-106-A** One, Marine Park, **Kings**, 10 Dec (Doug Gochfeld, ph D. Gochfeld)

Doug Gochfeld found and photographed single “Black” Brant at Floyd Bennett Field and the Salt Marsh Nature Center at Marine Park. The sightings were separated by nearly 11 months, with no other reports, but it is tempting to conclude that this may be the same bird. Photographs do not reveal any clear-cut differences, and adult geese often return annually to the same locale. Flocks of Brant present an under-appreciated opportunity for discovery, and the Committee encourages observers to carefully check flocks for “Black” and other non-local forms of Brant. Detailed photographs would be particularly important in helping establish the identification of other taxa.

**Barnacle Goose (*Branta leucopsis*)**

**2012-11-A/B** One, Wawayanda, **Orange**, 2 & 4 Mar (Kenneth M. McDermott, Jim Schlickenrieder, ph John H. Haas, Curt McDermott, J. Schlickenrieder)

**2012-80-A/C** One, Prospect Park, **Kings**, 25 Oct (Elliotte Rusty Harold, Christopher

Eliot, Andy Beiderman, ph C. Eliot, A. Beiderman)

**2012-95-A/C** One, Van Cortlandt Park, **Bronx**, 23, 25 Nov & 5 Jan 2013 (David Mako, Andrew Baksh, Jesse W. Jaycox, ph D. Mako, A. Baksh, J. Jaycox)

Barnacle Geese have become expected winter visitors to the Northeast and NYS, with many more records than Pink-footed Goose (*Anser brachyrhynchus*). These individuals were well photographed, so there were no questions about identification. The bird in Prospect Park provided the most discussion concerning origin. The bird was first found on 24 Oct, a very early date for one in NY. This, plus its arrival in the largest population center in the U.S. and relatively tame demeanor, produced concern among some members. Dominic Sherony provided a comprehensive review of records for the Northeast to the Committee, showing the earliest arrival on 6 Oct from Maine and several records between 6 and 10 Oct. In light of this information, the Committee decided to accept this along with the other two records.

### **Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)**

**2012-99-A** One, Lake Ontario from Lake Rd, Town of Wilson, **Niagara**, 15 Oct (Willie D'Anna)

**2012-101-A/C** One, Black River Bay at Pillar Point, **Jefferson**, 4 Nov to 20 Dec (Bill Purcell, Nick Leone, Jeff Bolsinger)

**2012-102-A/B** One, Montauk Point, **Suffolk**, 26 Nov & 22 Dec (Angus Wilson, Doug Gochfeld, ph D. Gochfeld)

Sightings of Pacific Loons in the Northeast have increased over the last decade, and the species is now nearly annual in NY, with most of the records from fall and winter. Three this fall represent the most documented in a single season in the state. Identification remains an issue, and separation from Common (*G. immer*) and Red-throated (*G. stellata*) Loons still presents a real challenge, but all three accepted records were nicely detailed and carefully eliminated similar species. Willie D'Anna found the Wilson bird on the relatively early date of 15 Oct, a flyby adult in breeding plumage. The previous earliest "arrival" accepted by NYSARC was 17 Oct in Rensselaer. The Jefferson bird was first noticed and tentatively identified on 4 Nov, but it wasn't until 12 Dec that decent enough views were obtained to confirm the identification. The loon remained until at least 20 Dec, seen only at great distance during most of that time. The three independent reports of this individual provided the first accepted record for that county. On 26 Nov Doug Gochfeld and Tom Johnson observed and photographed a Pacific Loon at Montauk Point, and Angus Wilson documented one there nearly a month later on 22 Dec, which we conservatively treat here as the same individual.

### **Western Grebe (*Aechmophorus occidentalis*)**

**2012-7-A** One, Allen H. Treman State Marine Park, Ithaca, **Tompkins**, 5 Feb (Robert LaCelle III, ph Joshua LaCelle)

**2012-113-A** Two, near Twin Oaks Campground, Cayuga Lake, **Cayuga**, 10 Feb (David Wheeler, ph D. Wheeler)

At least two Western Grebes were present on Cayuga Lake from 10 Jan-18 Apr,

ranging into Tompkins (10 Jan-6 Mar), Seneca (31 Mar-18 Apr) and Cayuga (8 Feb-17 Apr) Cos. Despite being seen by over 100 observers, only two documented records were received, both of which were accompanied by photos. The first individual was found and photographed by Chris Wood and Jessie Barry on 10 Jan at Myers Point, furnishing the first record for Tompkins Co. It was seen by dozens of observers over a period of a couple of hours before it drifted north and out of view. Subsequent efforts to find the bird failed, and it seemed it would not be seen again. Then a Western Grebe was found on 29 Jan at the south end of Cayuga Lake and was seen from several vantages intermittently through 6 Mar. On 8 Feb Tom Johnson and Jay McGowan found two Western Grebes at Twin Oaks Campground in Cayuga Co., which is near the north end of the lake. One individual had paler flanks and pale lores, which led some to question whether this could be a hybrid of Western and Clark's (*A. clarkii*) Grebes. The paler bird was heard calling on a later date, and all vocalizations were typical of Western Grebe. It is perhaps impossible to know the total number of birds involved in these reports, but it seems likely that "only" two individuals accounted for all the sightings. These were last seen by Dave Kennedy on 18 Apr from Cayuga Lake SP in Seneca Co.

**Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*)**

**2012-31-A** Fifty-four, c.77 nmi SE of Shinnecock Inlet, **Pelagic**, 26 May (Angus Wilson, ph A. Wilson)

**2012-32-A** One, Main Beach, East Hampton, **Suffolk**, 2 Jun (Angus Wilson)

**2012-86-A/B** One, Fort Niagara SP, **Niagara**, 30 Oct (James Pawlicki, Joe Mitchell)

These three sightings are remarkable in terms of the differing locations and circumstances. Over the past several years, it has become clear that numbers of Leach's Storm-Petrels occur over very deep water along the continental shelf-break and beyond during the summer months, especially towards the eastern boundary of the NYS waters. During a deep-sea fishing trip John Shemilt, Keegan Corcoran and Angus Wilson encountered multiple Leach's Storm-Petrels along the edge of a warm water (72-75°F) eddy that contained an interesting cool water (52-57°F) core. The majority of these birds were in areas where the depth exceeded 500 fathoms. Whether the presence of such numbers in eastern NYS shelf waters will be a sustained phenomenon is unclear, and continued documentation is encouraged. Based on dates and plumage assessments, these areas might provide foraging sites for birds from the large nesting colonies in Maine and Atlantic Canada. Observations from shore have always been extremely rare and are mostly in association with major storms. One well-described example seen from Main Beach, East Hampton, on 2 Jun was not storm-related. Perhaps the most unexpected record came during *Hurricane Sandy*, with one found off Fort Niagara SP by Jim Pawlicki and Joe Mitchell, who provided convincing documentation of plumage and flight style. As a note, large numbers of Leach's Storm-Petrels were found on reservoirs and lakes throughout the path of *Hurricane Sandy* south of NY, and others were reported in NYS that have not yet been documented.

### **Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*)**

**2012-41-A/B** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 5 Jul (Arie Gilbert, Derek Rogers, ph A. Gilbert)

Demonstrating that mid-summer does indeed produce some great birding, Derek Rogers and Arie Gilbert saw, described, and photographed an adult Brown Booby briefly flying over the flats at Cupsogue CP in Westhampton Dunes. This is only the 3rd report of a Brown Booby submitted to NYSARC since 1990.

### **American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)**

**2012-65-A/C** One, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 14 & 16 Aug & 8 Oct (Anders Peltomaa, Joseph O'Sullivan, Andrew Baksh, ph A. Peltomaa, A. Baksh)

**2012-79-A** Two, Rye, **Westchester**, 8 Oct (Benjamin Van Doren, ph Orlando Hidalgo, B. Van Doren)

**2012-92-A** One, Sands Point Preserve, **Nassau**, 15 Nov (Stephane Perreault)

With burgeoning colonies expanding north and west of the Mississippi River, it is perhaps not surprising that American White Pelicans continue to appear in NY in small numbers. Exceptional, though, was one visiting the East Pond at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge from 14 Aug to 11 Oct. The 2 photographed in Rye on 8 Oct were found by Margaret Collins the previous day and stayed in that area to 10 Oct. Another was found at Sands Point Preserve and well described by Stephane Perreault.

### **Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)**

**2012-67-A/C** One, Buffalo Harbor, Buffalo, **Erie**, 27 Aug (Gerald S. Lazarczyk, James Pawlicki, Joe Mitchell, ph J. Pawlicki)

Rarely found in upstate NY, a single Brown Pelican was spotted 27 Aug in Buffalo Harbor. Seen by several birders, this immature bird was well documented, and Jim Pawlicki obtained a diagnostic photo.

### **White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*)**

**2012-21-A/B** One, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 24 Apr & 5 May (Angus Wilson, Andrew Baksh, ph A. Baksh)

**2012-25-A/B** One, Scoy Pond, East Hampton, **Suffolk**, 13 May (Angus Wilson, Shaibal S. Mitra, ph A. Wilson, S. Mitra)

**2012-44-A/E** One, Modern Landfill Wetland Project, Lewiston, **Niagara**, 17-18 Jul (Gerald S. Lazarczyk, Kayo J. Roy, William Watson, Joe Mitchell, Willie D'Anna, ph K. Roy, J. Mitchell, W. D'Anna)

**2012-117-A** One, East Pond, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 30 Sep (Andrew Baksh, ph A. Baksh)

Once a major rarity, White-faced Ibis is now virtually annual in NY, with Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge retaining the title as the premier location for the species. Two of the 2012 reports were from Jamaica Bay and, although not proven, likely pertain to separate individuals. The first was an adult in alternate plumage photographed on 24 Apr by Andrew Baksh and subsequently observed by many others, including Angus Wilson. This was followed in the fall by an adult in basic plumage also discovered by Baksh. Also in the spring, an adult in

alternate plumage was found and nicely photographed on a shallow freshwater pond near East Hampton, Suffolk Co., by Shai Mitra and Patricia Lindsay. Seemingly long overdue, this constituted a first county record and visited the pond on a daily basis until 28 May. Finally, there was one inland record from Niagara Co. in western NY. This individual was found by Willie D'Anna while driving home from work, but, with only an old pair of binoculars, he could not tell if it was a Glossy (*P. falcinellus*) or a White-faced Ibis when he first saw it. He continued home and returned later with Betsy Potter and better optics to identify and photograph Niagara Co.'s first White-faced Ibis. The bird was subsequently seen by many of western NY's most active birders that evening and the following day. Remarkably, this is the first report of White-faced Ibis in *Kingbird* Region 1 since 1844, when a specimen, now in the NYS Museum, was collected on the Niagara River at Grand Island in Erie Co. and provided the state's first record (Beardslee and Mitchell 1965).

### **Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*)**

**2012-16-A** One, Prospect Park, **Kings**, 19 Apr (Russ Alderson)

**2012-22-A/C** One, Derby Hill, **Oswego**, 4 May (Bill Purcell, Kyle Wright, David Wheeler, ph D. Wheeler)

**2012-30-A/C** One, Hamburg Hawk Watch, **Erie**, 2 May (Jim Landau, Sharon Sisti, Bruce Chilton)

**2012-42-A** One, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 27 May (Roy Woodford, ph R. Woodford)

In recent years, the number of reports of both Swallow-tailed and Mississippi (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) Kites from the Northeast has been steadily increasing, and 2012 was the biggest year yet for Swallow-tailed Kite in NYS. As usual, all four of these records occurred in the spring, and the sightings were scattered over the state, with two from the NYC Boroughs (separated by over a month) and singles from the Lake Erie and Lake Ontario shores. True to form, the initial observations were the only ones in all four instances, and Swallow-tailed Kite remains one of the single most difficult birds to chase in the state. There are now roughly 36 records for NYS, with the number of observers only marginally higher. The nicely photographed Jamaica Bay individual came to light when the observer was directed to eBird by friends from outside of NY and then was directed to NYSARC by the eBird regional reviewer – this is another in the growing list of examples of the interconnectedness of the birding community, shedding light on rare bird records that might otherwise remain unknown to the community at large.

### **Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)**

**2012-28-A/B** One, Sterling Forest SP, **Orange**, 27 & 31 May (Kenneth M. McDermott, Barbara Butler, ph Curt McDermott, Jane Rossman, Deborah Tracy-Kral)

This bird was extremely well documented, with good descriptions and photos from multiple parties during its stay. Though not mentioned in the submitted reports, this adult was subsequently joined on 28 May by a second bird, and both stayed in the area to at least 24 Jun. Their attempted nesting, however, was

unsuccessful, perhaps due to disturbance, as the nest site they had selected was adjacent to a well-used parking lot, and the level of human activity may have been too much.

**Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)**

**2012-47-A** One, Derby Hill, **Oswego**, 18 Jun (Bill Purcell, ph B. Purcell, Tom Carrolan) Swainson's Hawk is now seen essentially annually in NYS, though there are astonishingly few records for downstate. This bird was an adult-like bird undergoing obvious molt, and so may have been a 2nd spring bird. It was nicely photographed flying by Derby Hill, which is where many of the Swainson's Hawk records in NY are from. NYSARC has reviewed over 40 records of Swainson's Hawk since 1979, of which over 30 have been accepted.

**Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*)**

**2012-90-A** One, Robert Moses SP, Fire Island, **Suffolk**, 8 Nov (Robert O. Paxton, ph Tim Byrne)

**2012-91-A** Two, Deep Hollow Ranch, Montauk, **Suffolk**, 12 Nov (John Gluth, ph J. Gluth)

The end of 2012 saw the largest incursion of Northern Lapwings into eastern North America in modern memory. This was thought to be due in large part to interaction of *Hurricane* (or more precisely *Post-Tropical Cyclone*) *Sandy* with meteorological and climatological patterns associated with the negative phase of the North Atlantic Oscillation. This brought about a phenomenon known as a Rex Block, which is when a large, mostly stationary high-pressure system sits poleward of a low-pressure system. In this particular case, the Rex Block was sitting in the North Atlantic close to Greenland and Iceland, supporting sustained winds from the east that stretched thousands of miles across the northern Atlantic Ocean. Interaction with *Sandy* amplified these winds, making them exceptionally strong, and accentuated what was already a potential "conveyor belt" for European strays in northeastern North America.

The first lapwing was found by park manager Tim Byrne in the median strip of the roadway at Robert Moses SP, and he had the presence of mind to photograph it. This was very fortunate because the park was still closed to the public due to the extensive hurricane damage, and the lapwing was not seen again. This exciting news and Byrne's images were relayed to the Committee by Bob Paxton. Birders frustrated by the apparent one-day wonder were much relieved when Jorn Ake found two Northern Lapwings in the fields of the Deep Hollow Ranch in Montauk. These were far more cooperative, and scores of birders were able to observe and photograph them over a 5-day period (10-14 Nov), but, inexplicably, only a single report was submitted. In hindsight, it is not surprising that NYS's contribution to the 2012 North American Northern Lapwing influx came from Long Island. Of the 5 previously accepted records for NYS, 4 have occurred on Long Island, with 3 of these from the eastern half of Suffolk Co. In addition, there are pre-NYSARC records of specimens from Merrick, Nassau Co., in 1883 and Mecox Bay, Suffolk Co., in late fall 1905,

with a sight record from near Montauk, Suffolk Co., 3-18 Dec 1966. Except for the 2012 Montauk pair, all other NYS records have been of single birds.

**Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)**

**2012-29-A** One, Jones Beach SP, **Nassau**, 29 May (Ed Becher)

The description of this individual in the Zach's Bay area of Jones Beach SP was sufficient to support the identification of this very distinctive and difficult to mistake species, now essentially annual downstate in the spring or summer. The bird was moving between the small pond on the golf course just west of Field 6 and the shore of Zach's Bay to the north.

**Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*)**

**2012-74-A/D** One, LaSalle Park, Webster, **Monroe**, 23 Sep (Drew Weber, Jeanne Skelly, Gary Chapin, Willie D'Anna, ph D. Weber, G. Chapin, W. D'Anna)

While scanning through a large flock of Pectoral Sandpipers (*C. melanotos*), Gary Chapin came across a juvenile Sharp-tailed Sandpiper. He recognized it as such immediately and quickly got the word out to the birding community, which allowed many others to view this Asian-breeding shorebird before it disappeared overnight. This is the 4th accepted record of Sharp-tailed Sandpiper for NYS, and, remarkably, this exact location previously hosted a juvenile Sharp-tailed in early Oct 2002, almost exactly a decade prior (see NYSARC 2002-38-A/E). The other two records (NYSARC 1981-12-A & 2008-43-A/E), as well as a non-accepted but possibly correct record (NYSARC 1983-16-A), were from the East Pond of Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens, and involved adults during Jul and early Aug. These two widely-separated locations hosting different age classes may reflect the apparent differential migration that this species shows in the fall, with the bulk of adults and juveniles taking distinctly separate southbound routes from each other, which includes the juveniles staging in large numbers in western Alaska after having crossed over from their breeding grounds in Asia.

**Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)**

**2012-45-A** One, Cupsogue County Park & Pikes Beach, **Suffolk**, 14 & 16 Jun (Michael R. McBrien, ph M. McBrien)

Michael McBrien found this stunning alternate plumaged Curlew Sandpiper on the tidal flats at Cupsogue CP on 14 Jun; the following day it had moved slightly east to Pikes Beach, where it continued through 18 Jun. Sightings of Curlew Sandpiper, like those of Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), have declined over the last couple of decades in NYS (Wilson 2001). Up until the mid 1990s this species was seen on a quite regular basis in NYS, but since then there have been only very few records in the state, a truly dramatic decrease in occurrence.

**Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)**

**2012-36-A/C** One, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, **Seneca**, 25 Jun (Bernie Carr, Jeanne Skelly, David Wheeler, ph Wade Rowley, Melissa Rowley, J. Skelly, D. Wheeler)

**2012-50-A** One, East Pond Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 1 Jul (Andrew Baksh,

ph A. Baksh)

**2012-112-A** One, East Pond Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 4 Jul (Andrew Baksh, ph A. Baksh)

**2012-115-A** One, East Pond Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 15 Jul (Andrew Baksh, ph A. Baksh)

**2012-116-A** One, East Pond Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, **Queens**, 2 Aug (Andrew Baksh, ph A. Baksh)

Ruff used to be a regular visitor to Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, but its frequency of occurrence in NY has dramatically declined over recent decades. In fact, before 2012, the only record from this millennium at the refuge was in 2006 (NYSARC 2006-77-A), so it was a refreshing change of pace that the summer of 2012 saw 4 different Ruffs appear on the East Pond through the shorebird season, and many people got to see at least one of these individuals over their stays. Unfortunately, the only observer to submit any reports to the Committee was Andrew Baksh, who also provided nice photos of each Ruff, the earliest two of which were males still sporting decent amounts of breeding plumage. The Montezuma bird, an adult male still retaining much of its black ruff, was first photographed and reported by Wade and Melissa Rowley on 24 Jun and was also enjoyed by many people the next day.

#### **Ross's Gull (*Rhodostethia rosea*)**

**2012-104-A** One, Long Point SP, **Cayuga**, 30 Oct (Christopher L. Wood, ph C. Wood)

With the approach of *Hurricane Sandy*, birders were anticipating the opportunity to see pelagic species near our coastal shoreline or even on inland lakes and reservoirs. Such a possibility brought Chris Wood to check Long Point State Park on Cayuga Lake. It was a very good move, as he found a Parasitic Jaeger (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) and an adult Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), two species that are exceptionally rare away from the coast and Great Lakes. However, the other bird that he found was not on anyone's radar as a possible storm vagrant. Wood noted a small gull with relatively long wings and tail, dusky underwings, and a broad white trailing edge to the wings, which he gradually realized had to be an adult Ross's Gull. The bird was distant, over a half-mile away, but in the ten minutes that he observed it, he also noted pale gray on the nape extending onto the sides of the breast and a dark area around the eye. These features all support the identification as this species, and some of them are certainly visible in the photos that Wood was able to obtain. Some have speculated that this gull was on the ocean off coastal New England and that it was blown inland by the very strong easterlies produced by the combination of a high-pressure system over Greenland and the approaching *Hurricane Sandy*. However, it seems more likely that it was migrating overland when it was grounded by the inclement weather (Brinkley 2013). The date is exceptionally early for this arctic vagrant, which historically has appeared later in fall or during the winter months. Remarkably, another adult Ross's Gull was seen only two days later on the Ontario side of the eastern end of Lake Erie. The possibility that these sightings involved the same individual cannot be ruled out.

**Franklin's Gull (*Leucophaeus pipixcan*)**

**2012-78-A/B** One, Knox-Marsellus Marsh, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Seneca, 7 & 8 Oct (William Watson, David Wheeler, ph D. Wheeler)

**2012-81-A/B** One, Derby Hill, Oswego, 21 Oct (Bill Purcell, David Wheeler, ph B. Purcell, Drew Weber)

**2012-100-A** One, Wilson, Niagara, 17 Aug (Willie D'Anna, ph W. D'Anna)

The fall of 2012 produced three records of Franklin's Gull in New York, all of which were non-coastal sightings. The bird at Derby Hill on Lake Ontario was in first basic plumage and was photographed as it flew past. The sighting at Montezuma NWR appeared to be an adult or at least a near-adult; this plumage has been observed much less frequently in NY. The bird on Lake Ontario in Wilson, Niagara Co., was still mostly in juvenal plumage. Juvenile Franklin's Gulls were formerly much more frequent in NY, with most sightings occurring on the Niagara River in Aug. An additional report in 2012 from the Niagara River was not submitted to NYSARC. In light of the near annual occurrence of this species on the Niagara River, the Committee decided at their 2013 annual meeting that they will no longer review reports of this species from that location; reports from anywhere else in NYS, including coastal regions, will continue to be reviewed.

**California Gull (*Larus californicus*)**

**2012-18-A** One, Devil's Hole SP, Niagara, 5 & 8 Feb (James Pawlicki, ph J. Pawlicki)

**2012-120-A** One, Devil's Hole SP, Niagara, 28 Dec (James Pawlicki, ph J. Pawlicki)

On the Niagara River, California Gull has been observed on a nearly annual basis since the very first sighting in 1992. Sightings in recent years have been more sporadic, with birders finding it more difficult to relocate birds that are reported. Whether this is due to the species feeding and/or roosting in areas that are not birded as heavily or spending less time in the area, or simply to fewer birds occurring on the Niagara River, is not yet known. The birds observed in 2012 were seen in the late winter of 2011-12 and in the early winter of 2012-13, and both were nicely photographed by the observer, Jim Pawlicki. The photos of the Dec individual are excellent and, as pointed out by Pawlicki in his report, strongly suggestive of the Great Plains race, *L. c. albertaensis*. This subspecies tends to show large mirrors on the outer two primaries, is slightly paler on the back and wings than the nominate race and thus closer in tone to the abundant Herring (*L. argentatus*) and Ring-billed (*L. delawarensis*) Gulls, and is slightly larger than the nominate race. The Committee appreciates and encourages thorough descriptions and high-quality photographs in attempting to assess the subspecies that may occur in NY, a task that we realize is not insignificant. Regarding the Feb sighting, Pawlicki noted ambiguous characters and wisely deferred from making a firm judgment as to subspecies.

**Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)**

**2012-12-A** One, Devil's Hole SP, Niagara, 10 Feb (Brad Carlson, ph B. Carlson)

**2012-19-A** One, Devil's Hole SP, Niagara, 8 Feb (James Pawlicki, ph J. Pawlicki)

The two accepted records of Thayer's Gull in 2012 were observed at the same location and just two days apart. The bird seen on 10 Feb was in second basic plumage. This was an interesting gull, in that many of the features it showed were suggestive of first basic plumage. A subtle but very good character for distinguishing a large gull in juvenal or first basic plumage from one in "retarded" second basic plumage is the shape of the tips of the outer primaries. The rounded tips on this individual suggested second basic, in contrast to the pointed tips a first cycle gull would show. Although the pattern on the spread wing was not described in detail nor photographed, an excellent photo of the bird standing, along with details supplied in the written report, persuaded the Committee to unanimously accept the record after discussion. The report submitted for the Thayer's Gull seen on 8 Feb included good photos of the bird standing and showing the spread wing. It was accepted in the first round of review.

At the 2013 annual meeting, the Committee decided that they would no longer review this species when observed along the Niagara River. Thayer's Gull has been conclusively documented there on the basis of specimens collected from the 1940s through the 1960s. Although Thayer's Gull has been reported as a regular uncommon migrant and winter visitor to the river by several very experienced gull-watchers over the years, there have been relatively few documented reports from that location. The identification of Thayer's Gull in the east is a well-known and particularly thorny problem. In recent years, however, the Committee has received a few reports supplemented with excellent photographs from the Niagara River, in part thanks to the growing ubiquity of birders carrying cameras. These reports, combined with the attestations of many gull aficionados (also referred to as larophiles, after the genus name of many large gull species), have convinced the Committee that documentation from the Niagara River for Thayer's Gull is no longer necessary. That said, careful reports and photographs of birds anywhere else in NY are strongly encouraged.

### **Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*)**

**2012-8-A** One, Hudson River waterfront, Beacon, **Dutchess**, 21 Jan (Curt McDermott, ph C. McDermott)

This report of a Slaty-backed Gull comes from the Hudson River in Dutchess Co. It was nicely documented with photos, which helped to rule out Lesser Black-backed (*L. fuscus*), Great Black-backed (*L. marinus*) and Western (*L. occidentalis*) Gulls, along with various hybrid combinations that might resemble this species. A spread-winged shot shows the typical pattern of this species, including the subterminal white spots on the middle and outer primaries, the often mentioned but not entirely diagnostic "string-of-pearls" arrangement produced by the white primary tongues.

### **Arctic Tern (*Sterna paradisaea*)**

**2012-40-A/B** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 16 Jun (Seth Ausubel, Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Ausubel, S. Mitra)

**2012-52-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 27 May (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-53-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 27 May (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-54-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 27 May (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-55-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 28 May (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-56-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 28 May (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-57-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 2 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-58-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 2 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-59-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 2 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra)  
**2012-60-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 4 Jul (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-61-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 27 May (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-62-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 2 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-63-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 2 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)  
**2012-64-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 2 Jun (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)

The late spring and early summer of 2012 provided another banner period for Arctic Tern sightings, with all of the accepted reports coming from the sand flats and inlet area of Cupsogue CP on the eastern side of Moriches Inlet on Long Island. The Committee received reports documenting 14 individuals. Several additional sightings, many photo-documented, were also reported to the listserve, submitted to eBird or to *The Kingbird* Regional Editors from visitors to Cupsogue, as well as from elsewhere on Long Island and offshore, but were not submitted to NYSARC. As in previous years, Shai Mitra has done yeoman's work in documenting this and other tern species at Cupsogue (Mitra 2009). These studies have demonstrated that few, if any, visiting Arctic Terns are of breeding age or, if adult, are not in full breeding condition. At the 2013 NYSARC Annual Meeting it was decided that, as this pattern was now sufficiently well established and seemingly continuing, the Committee would no longer review reports of Arctic Tern from Moriches Inlet and Cupsogue CP specifically. However, Arctic Terns from elsewhere in the state, including other areas of Long Island, will continue to be reviewed.

### **Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)**

**2012-38-A** One, Cupsogue County Park, **Suffolk**, 29 Jun (Eileen Schwinn, ph E. Schwinn)

**2012-46-A/F** One, Sandy Pond, **Oswego**, 25, 29-30 Jul, 6-7, 15, 21, 26 Aug (Bill Purcell, Kevin McGann, Gerald S. Lazarczyk, Kim Hartquist, Dominic Sherony, David Wheeler, ph B. Purcell, K. McGann, K. Hartquist, D. Sherony, D. Wheeler)

**2012-49-A** One, Mecox Inlet, **Suffolk**, 9 Jun (Andrew Baksh, ph A. Baksh)

In recent years Sandwich Tern has been seen on Long Island almost annually, and this trend continued in 2012 with two reports from there, both accepted by NYSARC. Neither of these records was related to a tropical storm, which continues the modern trend and is unlike older historical records, which were virtually always associated with storms. The bird on 9 Jun on the Mecox flats, documented by Andrew Baksh, was an adult in alternate plumage, while the 29 Jun bird in Eileen Schwinn's photos was in basic plumage. Much more surprising was the Sandwich Tern from Sandy Pond on Lake Ontario, furnishing what appears to be the first inland record in NY. Discovered by Bill Purcell on

25 Jul, the tern stayed for a month to at least 26 Aug and was seen by many inland birders, who were happy to add this bird to their state lists without having to drive to Long Island. This bird was an adult that was molting out of alternate plumage when found. Due to the exceptional non-coastal location, some people wondered if this bird might pertain to the nominate European subspecies, which is very similar to the North American race, the latter sometimes referred to as Cabot's Tern to distinguish the two forms. Without high quality close-up photos or a specimen, it is probably not possible to make such a determination with the Sandy Pond tern, and there don't appear to be any particularly compelling features in the photos submitted to suggest that possibility. However, birders are referred to an enlightening online article by Greg Neise, which discusses the differences between the two subspecies and proposes that a recent well-photographed Sandwich Tern in Illinois actually pertains to the European subspecies: <http://www.nabirding.com/2011/09/25/sandwich-or-cabots/>

### **South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)**

**2012-43-A** One, 26 miles S of Shinnecock Inlet, **Pelagic**, 24 Jun (Charles A. Witek, III, ph C. Witek)

Charles Witek and two companions were shadowed by this hungry South Polar Skua as they fished in relatively shallow mid-shelf waters south of eastern Long Island. The bird accompanied them for close to six hours, perhaps the longest encounter on record with a free-ranging skua in NYS waters, allowing close study and photography. The bird paddled alongside their slick of fish oil and scraps, picking at choice morsels and coming closer to the boat when deliberately offered small chunks of mackerel. If it drifted too far behind, the bird would fly back to the boat, settle again and continue to dine. Photos showing the skua in profile and with wings raised were submitted along with a careful description that included comparisons to other offshore species, such as shearwaters and immature gulls. This individual was notable for the buffy, cold tones of the head and body feathering and overall worn but not ragged appearance, both consistent with an adult. The near absence of warm tones was contraindicative of Great Skua (*S. skua*) at any age (Newell et al. 2013). Such birds are regularly encountered in the western North Atlantic in May and Jun, reflecting the documented trans-equatorial migration of adults after breeding (Kopp et al. 2011).

### **Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)**

**2012-111-A** One, Derby Hill, **Oswego**, 21 Oct (David Wheeler, ph D. Wheeler, Drew Weber)

Long-tailed Jaeger is the rarest of the three jaegers in passage through NYS and also shows the narrowest date range. The juvenile documented in this report was exceptionally late but passed close enough to be adequately photographed. Interestingly, and perhaps symptomatic of its delayed migration, the jaeger lingered off Derby Hill for most of the morning and at one point was seen chasing a Pomarine Jaeger (*S. pomarinus*)! Derby Hill is an excellent location to

view and photograph jaegers during their migration along the south shore of Lake Ontario, and NYSARC has accepted three prior Long-tailed Jaeger reports from this one site.

### **Common Murre (*Uria aalge*)**

**2012-2-A** Four, 4-6 miles S of Far Rockaway, **Pelagic**, 8 Jan (Paul A. Guris, ph P. Guris)

**2012-5-A** One, Massapequa, **Nassau**, 25 Jan (Adele Portanova, ph A. Portanova)

**2012-27-A** Eighty-six, c.14 miles SW of Jones Inlet, **Pelagic**, 28 Jan (Paul A. Guris, ph P. Guris)

Almost all NYS records for Common Murre are from Long Island or pelagic waters. This year continued the trend noted in our last report, with increased sightings of Common Murres in near shore waters. On 8 Jan, Marty Dellwo and Paul Guris, sailing out of Belmar, NJ, into NYS pelagic waters, came upon 4 Common Murres 4-6 miles south of Far Rockaway, NY. Three of these birds were in basic plumage, showing the white face with thin black eye stripe; the fourth bird was in a more advanced state of molt, but their photos left no doubt that Thick-billed Murre (*U. lomvia*) was ruled out as a possibility. An unprecedented number of Common Murres in NYS pelagic waters was encountered by Paul Guris and participants aboard a See Life Paulagics trip on 28 Jan out of Freeport, Nassau Co. – the trip tallied 86 individuals, with photos of 33 of these submitted to the Committee. The birds were found in a 14-mile path in calm seas south and southwest of Jones Inlet. A far more surprising find was the Common Murre observed on 25 Jan by Adele and Peter Portanova as it swam about in the so-called Grand Canal behind their home in Massapequa, Long Island. Adele was able to walk along the dock, keeping up with the bird and taking close photos; the murre seemed unconcerned by her presence but was not seen subsequently.

### **Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)**

**2012-97-A** Two, Church Rd, Hilton, **Monroe**, 27 Nov (Brenda Best, ph B. Best)

This report provided a brief description and a photograph documenting the continuing presence of two Eurasian Collared-Doves on a farm along Church Road near Hilton. Beginning in 2002, this has been the only known regular site for the species in NYS, with as many as eight birds present in past years. Eurasian Collared-Doves colonized North America very quickly, having spread first from an introduced population in the Bahamas to nearby Florida and then expanding very rapidly across most of the continental U.S. and southwestern Canada (Romagosa and McEneaney 1999). Their failure to colonize the northeast corner of the continent, including NYS, remains an unexplained puzzle.

### **Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)**

**2012-72-A/D** One, private residence on Pendergast Rd, Town of Lysander, **Onondaga**, 18-19 Sep, 9 Nov, 6 Dec (Bill Purcell, Brenda Best, Robert P. Yunick, David Wheeler, ph B. Purcell, A. Gray, Robert J. Pantle, D. Wheeler)

**2012-87-A** One, private residence on Powell Rd, Interlaken, **Seneca**, 4 Nov (Robert P.

Yunick, ph Robert J. Pantle, Anne Cooke)

**2012-88-A/B** One, private residence on Hamlet Ct, Wappingers Falls, **Dutchess**, 9 & 12 Nov (Robert P. Yunick, Barbara Butler, ph Steve Golladay)

Overall the Committee received five separate reports of this species, an increase over the more usual one or two reports. The previous high for reports submitted to NYSARC for a single year was four in 1993, although three of these did not separate Rufous from Allen's (*S. sasin*) Hummingbird. The reports received by NYSARC show that birders are paying more attention to the subtle details needed to separate immature and female hummingbirds. Three of the submitted reports were accepted as Rufous Hummingbirds. The first was an adult male photographed feeding from flowers and at a feeder in Phoenix at the home of Anne Gray; this bird, first spotted by the homeowner and subsequently banded by Robert Yunick on 6 Dec, was present from 16 Sep to 26 Dec. The other two reports were also both banded by Robert Yunick and were accompanied by photographs and complete measurements. A hatch year female Rufous Hummingbird was banded at the home of Marty Schlabach and MaryJean Welser in Interlaken on 4 Nov. A few days later, Bill Lee assisted Robert in banding a second Rufous Hummingbird at the home of Angelo and Barbara Giaimo in Wappingers Falls on 9 Nov. Based on wing cord, tail length and width of certain rectrices, this bird was also identified as a hatch-year female Rufous, and it continued at that location through 5 Dec.

### **Say's Phoebe (*Sayornis saya*)**

**2012-105-A** One, Robert Moses SP, **Suffolk**, 22 Oct (Mary Normandia)

An October day with northwest winds can make for very exciting migration watching along the barrier beaches of Long Island. Such was the case on 22 Oct, with Eastern Phoebes (*S. phoebe*) being especially prominent. Watching from near the Fire Island Hawk Watch, Mary Normandia discovered a Say's Phoebe, which perched on the steps of the Fire Island Lighthouse. The combination of a pale throat, medium gray back, salmon color on the underwings and belly, and black tail was sufficient to rule out other confusion species. To date, NYSARC has accepted twelve reports of Say's Phoebe, with the majority from the eastern part of the state in fall or early winter.

### **Western Kingbird (*Tyrannus verticalis*)**

**2012-70-A/F** One, Lakeshore Rd, Town of Yates, **Orleans**, 10 Sep (Gerald S. Lazarczyk, Kayo J. Roy, Willie D'Anna, William Watson, James Pawlicki, David Wheeler, ph K. Roy, W. D'Anna, J. Pawlicki, D. Wheeler)

**2012-76-A/B** One, Van Dyne Spoor Rd, Town of Savannah, **Wayne**, 5 Oct (Drew Weber, David Wheeler, ph D. Weber, D. Wheeler)

The Committee has received five reports of Western Kingbird from upstate NY in the last three years, with two in 2010, one in 2011 and two in the fall of 2012. The first sighting involved a first-year Western Kingbird discovered by Brett Ewald on 10 Sep on Lakeshore Road in Yates. Although it only stayed for one day, many local observers were able to see it. The second bird was found on 5 Oct by Jim Tarolli along Van Dyne Spoor Road, also in western NY. Although

both birds were foraging on private property, they conveniently perched on power lines, allowing good views and photographs from observers situated on public roads.

### **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus forficatus*)**

**2012-69-A** One, Gilgo Beach, **Suffolk**, 29 May (Robert O. Paxton, ph Sarah Plimpton)

**2012-94-A/B** One, Sunken Meadow SP, **Suffolk**, 11 Nov (Jerry Platt, Beth Platt, ph J. Platt, B. Platt)

Both 2012 reports came from Long Island, one in the spring on the south shore and the other in the fall almost due north of the spring site but on the north shore. While having breakfast, Sarah Plimpton noticed a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher perched on a telephone wire about 30 feet beyond the sliding doors of her kitchen. She telephoned the exciting news to other local birders, but only her husband Bob Paxton was able to see the bird before it disappeared. Fortunately Plimpton was able to take several good photographs documenting the fleeting visitor. The second sighting was made on 11 Nov when Jerry and Beth Platt saw and photographed an adult Scissor-tailed Flycatcher at the beginning of a trailhead in Sunken Meadow SP. These sightings continue the trend of there being one or two sightings in NY per year and, unfortunately, the habit of these birds disappearing rather quickly after discovery.

### **Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)**

**2012-93-A** One, North Hamlin Rd, Hamlin, **Monroe**, 13 Jun (Dominic Sherony, ph D. Sherony)

Up until 1983, this attractive species was recorded annually in NY as a spring migrant along the shore of Lake Ontario, usually in Apr but sometimes as early as late Mar. As recently as 1981 it was also an annual breeder near Lake Shore Road in Kendall, as recorded in the 1980 Breeding Bird Atlas (Andrle and Carroll 1988). Since the mid 1980s this species has declined alarmingly throughout eastern North America and is now only found as a vagrant in NYS, with a preference for western and central NY. Dave Tetlow discovered this individual, documented by Dominic Sherony, along North Hamlin Rd west of the Hamlin-Parma Town Line Rd.

### **Cave Swallow (*Petrochelidon fulva*)**

**2012-84-A/C** One, Woodlawn Beach SP, **Erie**, 1-2 Nov (William Watson, James Pawlicki, Joe Mitchell, ph J. Pawlicki, J. Mitchell)

**2012-107-A** Three, Lake Ontario shore, Lake Rd, Town of Wilson, **Niagara**, 26 Oct (Willie D'Anna)

**2012-108-A** One, Erie Basin Marina, Buffalo, **Erie**, 8 Nov (James Pawlicki)

As in a few years past, the fall of 2012 produced a significant flight of Cave Swallows in western NY, primarily through Buffalo and along the south shore of Lake Ontario. The three reports received all came from Region 1. Additional strong flights were reported at Hamlin Beach SP on 24, 25 and 26 Oct, but NYSARC reports were not submitted. The previous years with large fall incursions of Cave Swallows were in 2004, 2005, 2007, and 2008. There was

only one report to NYSARC in 2010 and none in 2006, 2009 or 2011. One difficulty with groups of Cave Swallows is that they are not always close enough for accurate identification, and a small number of other more common swallows can be mixed in with the Cave Swallows.

This year's first report of Cave Swallow came on 26 Oct when Willie D'Anna and Betsy Potter saw a total of 11 swallows in four different groups from their lakeshore property in Wilson, but only three individuals were confidently identified as this species due to difficult viewing conditions. As is usually the case, these birds were seen flying west along the Lake Ontario shore. Although these were brief views, the identifications were based on the overall plumage, including a buffy throat, and one might presume that most or all of these were this species. On 1 Nov, one Cave Swallow was seen both perched and flying at Woodlawn Beach SP in Hamburg by five Buffalo birders. The description of the plumage clearly eliminated the more common Cliff Swallow (*P. pyrrhonota*), which is usually gone by that date. Jim Pawlicki was able to get a photo of this bird in the air and identified it as a hatch-year bird. In an additional report, it was most likely the same bird seen the following day by three more birders and photographed by Joe Mitchell. Finally, the last report occurred on 8 Nov when Jim Pawlicki noted a Cave Swallow at the Erie Basin Marina in Buffalo Harbor. This bird was identified by the underparts coloration, rusty-orange throat, tail features, and pale buffy-orange rump.

#### **Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*)**

**2012-98-A/D** One, Sampson SP, **Seneca**, 9-11 Dec (William Watson, Robert Grosek, Brenda Best, Dominic Sherony, ph R. Grosek, Matt Voelker, D. Sherony)

For the second time in three years, a Townsend's Solitaire spent the winter in western NY, and three observers included photographs with their reports. It was first found in early Dec by a birder from Ithaca at Sampson SP on the west side of Seneca Lake in Romulus. With patience, many observers were subsequently able to locate the bird in the extensive wooded area it claimed as a territory, usually by listening for its call in the early morning. Typical of this species, it was feeding on berries. This bird remained well into Jan of 2013. In 2010, a Townsend's Solitaire wintered at a location in Point Peninsula, remaining into Feb 2011.

#### **Virginia's Warbler (*Oreothlypis virginiae*)**

**2012-89-A/B** One, Alley Pond Park, **Queens**, 9 & 11 Nov (John Gluth, Andrew Baksh, ph J. Gluth, A. Baksh)

Who could have predicted that 2012 would begin and (nearly) end with remarkable 1st state records of two southwestern warblers? Following the much-celebrated Grace's Warbler (*Setophaga graciae*) in Jan 2012 (NYSARC 2012-1-A/G below), Eric Miller discovered this Virginia's Warbler on 31 Oct in Alley Pond Park, Queens Co. The warbler proved frustratingly elusive over the next several days, despite being diligently sought after by many local birders, and it wasn't seen again until Eric relocated it on 5 Nov. Even then, there was a gap of

three days until it was located once again by Andrew Baksh on 9 Nov and the much-desired photographs finally obtained. For the next three weeks the warbler was glimpsed intermittently and sometimes photographed by many birders visiting from all over the region, with the last firm report on 30 Nov. A color photograph by Steve Walter, showing the gray back and wings lacking any hints of green, complete eye ring, and sulfur yellow undertail coverts, has been published (*The Kingbird* 63(1):45). Virginia's Warbler has long been predicted as a potential addition to the state avifauna and is not as unprecedented in the northeast as Grace's Warbler, with multiple records including recent sightings in Maine in Nov 2011 and Maryland in Jan-Mar 2012. Similarities in general appearance to other warblers, most notably the western *ridgwayi* subspecies of Nashville Warbler (*O. ruficapilla*), and perhaps its secretive behavior away from the breeding grounds, have frustrated several other potential sightings in the past, three of which have been submitted to NYSARC (1983-20-A, 2000-78-A and 2001-31-A/B). As such, the Alley Pond Park individual represents the 1st accepted record for NYS.

**“Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata auduboni*)**

**2012-9-A** One, Sunken Meadow SP, **Suffolk**, 11, 23, 24 Jan & 10 Feb (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)

**2012-119-A** One, Onondaga Lake Creek Walk, **Onondaga**, 28 Nov (David Wheeler, ph Andrew VanNorstrand)

Patricia Lindsay and Shai Mitra found a female “Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler at Sunken Meadow SP in Suffolk Co. on 11 Jan, and it evidently wintered at that location, with additional sightings at least through 26 Feb. Although no further reports were submitted to the Committee, the same or another female was found at this location in Dec 2012, and this bird again apparently over-wintered. Another “Audubon’s” was found at the Onondaga Lake Creek Walk by Andrew VanNorstrand on 28 Nov; although only one submission was received detailing this discovery, this bird was reported through 15 Dec. NYSARC has accepted four prior records, three from upstate NY and a fourth from Nassau Co. in 2009.

**Grace’s Warbler (*Setophaga graciae*)**

**2012-1-A/G** One, Point Lookout Town Park, **Nassau**, 1 & 4 Jan (Angus Wilson, Shawn Billerman, Doug Gochfeld, Richard Guthrie, Thomas W. Burke, Seth Ausubel, Douglas J. Futuyma, ph D. Gochfeld, R. Guthrie, Lloyd Spitalnik, David Speiser, S. Ausubel)

Few could have predicted this attractive denizen of southwestern pine forests would be a future addition to the NYS Checklist, especially from a coastal beach in the depths of winter. Working their territory on the 1 Jan Southern Nassau County Christmas Bird Count, Doug Gochfeld and Andrew Baksh noticed an intriguing warbler flitting through a stand of Japanese black pines near Point Lookout in Nassau Co. Initially expecting this to be one of the more likely possibilities for a wintering warbler, such as Pine Warbler (*Setophaga pinus*), Gochfeld very quickly zeroed in on the correct identification, due in part to his

familiarity with the species from fieldwork in Arizona. Photographs were secured, and the thrilling news spread very rapidly. Soon dozens of birders were on site and successfully viewing the bird, the first ever recorded in northeastern North America and only the second east of the Mississippi River (one in Chicago, IL, on 8 Sep 2003). The Grace's Warbler was last noted on 4 Jan, with most of the few hundred birders visiting the site rewarded with very pleasing views of an exceptional 1st record for NYS.

#### **Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes grammacus*)**

**2012-4-A/B** One, West Yates Center Rd & County Line Rd, **Orleans/Niagara**, 21 Jan (Jeanne Skelly, Gary Chapin, ph J. Skelly, G. Chapin)

**2012-6-A** One, Lakeshore Road, **Orleans**, 30-31 Jan (Jeanne Skelly, ph J. Skelly)

Two Lark Sparrows were found in Jan 2012 in relatively close proximity in upstate NY. The first was spotted on 21 Jan by Jeanne Skelly and Gary Chapin along the border of Orleans and Niagara Cos., with the second being discovered by David Tetlow on 29 Jan at a feeder in eastern Orleans Co. Jeanne Skelly, who provided reports on both birds, felt they were different individuals, and this is supported by the submitted photographs. The West Yates Center Rd bird was seen only by the finders on the day of its discovery, whereas the second individual remained with a number of White-crowned Sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) until 5 Mar. A handful of Lark Sparrows occur each fall on Long Island, but the species is distinctly less regular upstate; this pattern, however, may be changing, as the number accepted from upstate has increased in recent years, with nine since 2001 but only five from the three decades prior to that.

#### **Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*)**

**2012-77-A** One, Floyd Bennett Field, **Kings**, 6 Oct (Christopher Eliot, ph C. Eliot, Heydi Lopes)

Heydi Lopes and Rob Jett found this Le Conte's Sparrow in the coastal scrub at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn. This is the 15th record accepted by NYSARC since 1991 but only the 6th since 1998. Nearly all records prior to 2000 were in upstate New York, and most of these were in Apr, May or Jun. After 1998, all accepted records are from *Kingbird* Regions 9 and 10, with five of these occurring in Oct along with one Jan record from Suffolk Co. (NYSARC 2011-1-A/B).

#### **Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*)**

**2012-82-A/E** One, private residence on Clark Rd, Canastota, **Madison**, 3-10 Nov (Ruth Kuryla, Bill Purcell, Kenneth M. McDermott, Brenda Best, David Wheeler, ph R. Kuryla, B. Best, D. Wheeler)

This first-winter Harris's Sparrow visited a feeder at the home of the finder, Ruth Kuryla, in Canastota for a week before meeting its demise in the claws of a neighbor's cat. During this time it was seen and photographed by a number of birders. Since 1978, NYSARC has accepted 18 records of Harris's Sparrow, an average of about one every other year. As with this Madison Co. record, the majority of prior records are from upstate NY, and most records are from late

fall to early spring.

**Western Tanager (*Piranga ludoviciana*)**

**2012-96-A** One, private residence on Castle Point Rd, Athens, **Greene**, 30 Nov (Will Raup, ph W. Raup)

This nicely marked Western Tanager visited a feeder for a couple of days before it was brought to the attention of the local birding community and the identity confirmed on 29 Nov. It was seen and photographed by a number of birders before it was last noted on 6 Dec, but Will Raup submitted the only report to NYSARC.

**Painted Bunting (*Passerina ciris*)**

**2012-110-A/B** One, Alley Pond Park, **Queens**, 25 Nov (Doug Gochfeld, Andrew Baksh, ph D. Gochfeld, A. Baksh)

The hordes of birders visiting Alley Pond Park in search of the long-staying but elusive Virginia's Warbler (*Oreothlypis virginiae*) also turned up a number of other unusual records, the next best being this female/immature Painted Bunting found by Alley Pond regular Eric Miller, who also had originally discovered the Virginia's Warbler. Unfortunately the Painted Bunting was less accommodating, being seen only on 25-26 Nov. This is the 17th Painted Bunting accepted by NYSARC since 1977. The prior records were evenly split between upstate and downstate Region 10, but this is only the 5th fall record.

**Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)**

**2012-20-A/C** One, West Corners Marsh, Endicott, **Broome**, 26 Apr-7 May (Sara Kinch, J. Gary Kohlenberg, David Wheeler, ph Jerry Acton, G. Kohlenberg, D. Wheeler)

**2012-75-A/E** One, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, Town of Savannah, **Wayne**, 30 Sep and 5, 8, 20 Oct (Drew Weber, William Watson, Dave Kiehm, Leona Lauster, David Wheeler, ph D. Weber, D. Kiehm, D. Wheeler)

**2012-103-A** One, Hog Hole, Ithaca, **Tompkins**, 10 Mar (Christopher L. Wood)

Since being added back to the statewide review list a decade ago after a substantial period with few reports, recent years have featured an increase in the number of sightings of this species from across the state. This year all reports received were from upstate, in Mar, Apr-May and Sep-Oct, and all featured adult males, which certainly stand out among the commoner icterids. The Endicott bird was singing in suitable habitat for about two weeks, and the Montezuma bird was seen and photographed by a number of observers during its lengthy stay. The Mar observation occurred during a good movement of northbound icterids. Prior to 2012, NYSARC had accepted 15 records since 2003.

**Bullock's Oriole (*Icterus bullockii*)**

**2012-15-A** One, private residence, Kiwassa Lake Outlet, Saranac Lake, **Franklin**, 13 Apr (Katie Woodruff, Myndy Woodruff, ph K. Woodruff)

While visiting their cottage southeast of Saranac Lake, the observers noticed a male Bullock's Oriole coming to their feeders and submitted the sighting to

eBird (checklist S10433418) that same day. The oriole remained throughout the afternoon but unfortunately didn't return the following day. A diagnostic photograph was submitted with their NYSARC report. This is only the 3rd Bullock's Oriole accepted by the Committee since 1977, with the other two (NYSARC 2007-11-A/C and 2009-8-A/C) also coming to feeders in winter.

### **Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte tephrocotis*)**

**2012-13-A/J** One, private residence on Route 12D, Locust Grove, **Lewis**, 5-7 Mar (Benjamin Van Doren, Richard Guthrie, Gerald S. Lazarczyk, Seth Ausubel, Kenneth M. McDermott, Jeanne Skelly, Jim Schlickenrieder, Larry Federman, Robert LaCelle III, David Wheeler, ph B. Van Doren, R. Guthrie, G. Lazarczyk, S. Ausubel, John H. Haas, J. Schlickenrieder, L. Federman, D. Wheeler)

When NYS's first Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (NYSARC 2011-119-A) made a one-day appearance high up in the Catskill Mountains in Dec 2011, many thought it would be a long time before there was another opportunity to see one in the state. Thus it came as a great surprise when on 4 Mar 2012 Nancy Loomis posted a photograph on the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Facebook page of an unfamiliar bird coming to her feeders in Locust Grove. The mystery visitor was quickly identified as a Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch. Nancy generously allowed visiting birders to watch her feeders, and many were lucky enough to see and photograph the Rosy-Finch, which remained until the morning of 8 Mar. See Ausubel 2012 for a fuller account, including two photographs by Corey Finger. Given the distance between the Catskills and this site, it seems unlikely that the same bird was involved in both occurrences, although this cannot be ruled out. Interestingly, the winter of 2011/2012 featured several Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches outside their normal range, including records from eastern Manitoba and Ontario and, perhaps oddest of all, an individual in Arkansas that was present for a few days in early May. The Lewis Co. bird is considered the 2nd accepted record for NYS.

## **2012 Reports Accepted in Revised Form**

### **Fea's/Zino's Petrel (*Pterodroma feae/madeira*)**

**2012-35-A** One, 7.3 nmi SE of Montauk Lighthouse (40.98683, -71.74178), **Pelagic**, 19 Jun (Anthony Collerton; ph A. Collerton)

Towards the end of a productive day of birding offshore, Anthony Collerton and charter skipper Captain Max Kramer encountered a school of Atlantic bluefin tuna feeding along a temperature break about 7.3 nautical miles (8.5 statute miles) southeast of the lighthouse at Montauk Point in Suffolk Co. As is often the case, the predatory fish were accompanied by pelagic birds, specifically Great Shearwaters (*Puffinus gravis*), Wilson's Storm-Petrels (*Oceanites oceanicus*) and Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) feasting on the bait being pushed to the surface. Whilst watching the action, Collerton noticed a smaller grayish seabird slip through the throng, passing close (40 feet) to the boat but not stopping. He immediately recognized it as a *Pterodroma* petrel and yelled

out “Fea’s Petrel, we gotta chase that bird.” In hot pursuit, Collerton succeeded in taking several photographs showing the bird from behind but tilted slightly to reveal the flanks and head. Four of these photographs were included in the report and two have been published previously (*The Kingbird* 62(4):325). Salient features clearly evident in the photographs included the solidly black bill, the pronounced brown “M” mark across the gray upper surface of the wings, the pale gray uppertail coverts and tail, the dark underwings, a partial collar, and a dark smudge over the eye contrasting with the paler throat and lores. The encounter, though, was unfortunately brief, which is not unusual for these generally boat-shy seabirds. The relative proximity of this sighting so close to shore is rather unexpected, but of course there are few rules when it comes to seabirds.

A handful of *Pterodroma* petrels nest in the North Atlantic, with several other species as either documented or anticipated vagrants from the southern hemisphere. Three regularly occurring species, Black-capped Petrel (*P. hasitata*), Bermuda Petrel (*P. cahow*) and Trindade/Herald Petrel (*P. arminjoniana*), could be readily excluded based on the dark underwing, pale tail and other features. The bird was submitted to the Committee as Fea’s Petrel (*P. feae*), the most numerous of a cluster of two, possibly three, closely related species nesting on remote islands in the eastern North Atlantic. One additional species, Soft-plumaged Petrel (*P. mollis*), which is abundant in the South Atlantic and more closely resembles the members of the *feae*-complex, could also be ruled out by the absence of a more complete collar and other features. Our knowledge of the field identification and systematics of the *feae*-complex is incomplete but is edging steadily forward (Robb et al. 2008; Shirihaï et al. 2010; Howell 2012; Flood et al. 2013). While unanimously endorsing the NY bird as belonging to the *feae*-complex, the Committee felt that the smaller and far less numerous Zino’s Petrel (*P. madeira*) could not be rigorously excluded based on the images submitted along with additional written details. A series of five criteria deemed essential for the field identification of Fea’s and Zino’s Petrels has been developed, although there is still disagreement about the stringency to which each of these must be held and the extent of variation within these species (Flood et al. 2013). Unfortunately, the photographs were not ideal for the full assessment of these criteria. For instance, the bill, which, compared to Zino’s, is only marginally heavier in the Fea’s Petrels originating from the Cape Verde Islands, was visible in only two of the four images and, in these, was presented at an oblique angle rather than fully side on. Likewise, the distribution and extent of the whitish under-wing coverts, another of the key criteria, could not be properly assessed in any of the images.

Most North American records of *feae*-complex petrels have come from the deep waters at the western edge of the Gulf Stream during the summer months (mid-May to mid-Sep), principally off North Carolina but also off Virginia, South Carolina and Georgia. Additionally, there are a few sightings in cooler waters as far north as Nova Scotia (Hooker and Baird 1997) and an even greater

number of sightings off Britain and Ireland (Flood et al. 2013), indicating a broader dispersal within the North Atlantic. The identification of these *feae*-complex petrels away from the breeding islands has caused vigorous debate in terms of whether or not these can be assigned to species. However, a number of individuals have now been sufficiently well photo-documented to furnish accepted at sea records of Fea's Petrel on both sides of the North Atlantic, and there is even a convincing Zino's Petrel from North Carolina (Howell 2012; Flood et al. 2013). Because of the severity of the identification challenge as well as the tremendous interest in the topic, this submission was extensively debated within the Committee. Some members supported identification to species, based mainly on the perceived heaviness of the bill, but others were inclined to take a more cautious stance, reflecting the limitations of the images. After multiple rounds of voting, the Committee agreed to accept this sighting as the 1st NYS record of Fea's/Zino's Petrel (*P. feae/madeira*) and to add it to the NYS Avian Checklist as such.

**Skua sp. (*Stercorarius* sp.)**

**2012-85-A** One, Cemetery of the Resurrection, **Richmond**, 30 Oct (Thomas St. Pierre, ph T. St. Pierre)

Although *Hurricane Sandy* brought fewer seabirds to coastal NY than some previous tropical depressions, there were a few noteworthy surprises. Thomas St. Pierre and Anthony Ciancimino were birding cemetery grounds near the coast on Staten Island when they noticed a skua that was flying overhead towards Raritan Bay. Not knowing for sure what the bird was exactly but realizing it was unusual, St. Pierre instinctively reached for his camera and obtained 14 images in rapid fire. Five of these were included in the report and clearly show a large skua coming towards and then past them. Although the images were slightly underexposed, the characteristic hulking profile, heavy hooked bill and prominent white wing flashes of a large skua were clearly evident. The bird was in active wing molt, having dropped the two innermost primaries (P1-P2) on both wings and had already replaced several in the middle (P3-P7), leaving the three outermost (P8-P10) obviously worn. The sighting was submitted as a South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*), but the Committee felt that confident identification to species was not possible. By late Oct both Great (*S. skua*) and South Polar Skuas could be present in the western North Atlantic, and either species might have been caught up in this massive storm system. Skua identification can be fraught with difficulty (Malling Olsen and Larsson 1997; Newell et al. 2013). Wing molt status may be useful, but it seems that the periods of molt for adult South Polar and Great Skuas overlap broadly with those of first- and second-cycle birds of the other species; thus an accurate assessment of age is essential but was not possible from the images obtained. As a result, the record was accepted as a Skua, species uncertain.

**Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus/sasin*)**

**2012-83-A** One, private residence, Henrietta, **Monroe**, 24 Oct (Jeanne Skelly, ph J.

Skelly)

This immature or female hummingbird appeared in the fall at a private residence in Henrietta and was observed and described on 24 Oct by Jeanne Skelly. The overall description indicated a *Selasphorus* hummingbird, and the photos, description of the throat and size eliminated Calliope (*Stellula calliope*) and Broad-tailed (*S. platycercus*). But the Committee did not feel that the assessments of the tail feathers were precise enough to separate Rufous (*S. rufus*), which the report was submitted as, from Allen's (*S. sasin*), despite the fact that the bird showed considerable rufous in the tail. Taking the more conservative stance, this sighting was thus accepted as a Rufous/Allen's Hummingbird (*S. rufus/sasin*).

### **Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*)**

**2012-118-A** One, private residence on Gallagher Rd, Baldwinsville, **Onondaga**, 27 Nov-1 Dec (Gregory Butler, ph G. Butler)

This young male Summer Tanager, initially submitted as a Scarlet Tanager (*P. olivacea*), visited a feeder in Baldwinsville for 5 days in late Nov to 1 Dec. Good diagnostic photographs were submitted with the report. Summer Tanager is regular in spring downstate but is only an irregular visitor to upstate NY, occurring in both the spring and late fall, where it remains a review species. Since 1977 NYSARC has accepted 21 upstate records; of these, 6, all since 2000, are from the months of Nov and Dec.

## **2012 Reports No Position Taken**

### **Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*)**

**2012-34-A** Two, 3rd Ave & 21st St, Watervliet, **Albany**, 17 Jun (Richard Guthrie, ph R. Guthrie)

**2012-93-A/B** Four, West Ridge Plaza, Rochester, **Monroe**, 22 Nov & 14 Dec (Gary Chapin, Dominic Sherony, ph G. Chapin, D. Sherony)

Since Monk Parakeet first appeared in the NYC area in 1971, their population has grown and spread to urban areas of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania. NYSARC has reviewed two previous sightings, one from Orange Co. in 2003 that was accepted as a possible extension of the NYC population, and a second from Erie Co., also in 2003, involving two birds. The latter was treated as Origins Uncertain due to the distance from the eastern feral populations and lack of information on whether this species is capable of moving long distances unaided. There have been other very infrequent reports of individual birds of this species in western NY as far back as 1974, with no evidence of continued presence.

The Committee received two reports from 2012, each involving multiple birds. In Jun, a pair built a nest on an electrical transformer on a pole in Watervliet near Troy, but this was considered a hazard and was intentionally destroyed by the DEC. The nest was built and occupied by two birds and had two eggs. With his report, Richard Guthrie provided photographs of the nest and

two adult birds. Then, in the summer, local residents notified Mike Wasilco of the DEC about some free-ranging parakeets in Greece, Monroe Co., which he subsequently identified as Monk Parakeets. The flock originally contained five individuals, and these were viewed by many observers. Nests were built atop a cell phone tower, but the Committee is unaware of any confirmed eggs or presence of fledglings. At least two individuals continue there as of the time of this writing. It is difficult to know whether these sightings represent an extension of established populations elsewhere or are independently derived colonies from recently released cagebirds. The species is relatively common in captivity and escapes do occur. However, no leg bands were observed, but this is tempered by the fact that captive parrots are not necessarily banded. The fact that in both instances multiple individuals were present is more supportive of expansion from one of the feral populations. Given these ambiguities, the fact that Monk Parakeet is well established in NYS, albeit in specific areas, and the straightforward identification, the Committee decided to take no specific position regarding these two reports, but they are of course retained in the NYSARC Archive.

## **2011 Reports Accepted**

### **Yellow-billed Loon (*Gavia adamsii*)**

**2011-152-A** One, Hamlin Beach SP, **Monroe**, 16 Oct (Christopher L. Wood, ph C. Wood)

This remarkable record is made even more exceptional due to the conditions of the sighting. During a lake watch that had already produced several hundred loons flying by, Chris Wood spotted a distant loon in flight above the horizon. Following the bird as it flew west, it finally dropped below the horizon, revealing the most critical field mark, the pale yellow bill. This allowed Wood to immediately identify it as an alternate plumaged Yellow-billed Loon. Other features that helped eliminate Common Loon (*G. immer*) once the bird landed were that the mostly yellow bill was held slightly above the horizontal, the upper-parts showed more extensive white, and the head was more blocky and flat-crowned. Compared to a nearby Common Loon, the Yellow-billed appeared to be slightly larger. Over the six minutes that the bird was in view on the lake, some photo/video documentation was attempted, though it was largely unsuccessful because of the extreme choppiness of the water and distance of the bird. For reasons that are not fully known, Yellow-billed Loon is extremely rare in the Northeast. This is the fourth record for NYS, with two prior records also being on or close to Lake Ontario, consistent with the idea that small numbers of this species may travel east rather than west from their high-arctic breeding grounds and enter the Great Lakes system.

### **Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*)**

**2011-147-A** Five, Veterans Memorial Pier to Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, **Kings**, 28 Aug (Doug Gochfeld, ph D. Gochfeld)

This belated report associated with the passage of *Tropical Storm Irene* included excellent photos of one individual taken when it came very close to the observers positioned on the bank of the Hudson River Estuary at Veterans Memorial Pier. The tally of 5 individuals was based on several encounters at multiple locations in New York Bay throughout the day.

**Sooty Tern (*Onychoprion fuscatus*)**

**2011-149-A** One, Jones Beach SP, **Nassau**, 28 Aug (Shaibal S. Mitra)

Another belated report related to *Tropical Storm Irene*. This bird was spotted by Mike Cooper flying out of Jones Inlet a few hours after the passage of the storm and studied by multiple observers as it made its way back out to sea.

**Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*)**

**2011-150-A** One, Lake Montauk Inlet, **Suffolk**, 29 Aug (Shaibal S. Mitra, ph S. Mitra)

A photo of this bird sitting with Common Terns at the Lake Montauk Inlet the day after the passage of *Tropical Storm Irene* was belatedly submitted, joining the 10 previously accepted sightings of this species that were related to that storm. Scattered reports from the same time period suggest that there may have been upwards of 30 or more Sandwich Terns observed in NY during and after the passage of the storm.

**South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*)**

**2011-146-A** Two, Hook Pond, East Hampton, **Suffolk**, 28 Aug (Angus Wilson, ph A. Wilson)

After *Tropical Storm Irene* made landfall in the early hours of 28 Aug, strong winds and heavy rains continued to batter eastern Long Island throughout the day. With the ocean in full fury, Angus Wilson looked for birds on the eastern arm of Hook Pond in East Hampton, one of few places in the village that remained accessible. Finding shelter behind a hedgerow near the Maidstone Golf Club maintenance building, he was able to watch three Sooty Terns (*Onychoprion fuscatus*), at least seven Bridled Terns (*O. anaethetus*) and a handful of Black Terns (*Chlidonias niger*) swooping and hovering just yards away. Two Red-necked Phalaropes (*Phalaropus lobatus*) sat on a sodden putting green with a couple of Whimbrels (*Numenius phaeopus*) and other shorebirds. Suddenly two South Polar Skuas, the subject of this submission, drifted out of the mist, coming low overhead along the same easterly track used minutes before by a Parasitic Jaeger (*S. parasiticus*). The two skuas stayed very close together, soaring in and out of view, and at one point dipped to just 20 feet above the observer's head. Despite being so close, these birds were difficult to photograph because of the very poor lighting and near-continuous rain, but the skuas made several passes, and a few usable images were obtained. These were included with the written report and show the slightly paler napes, the absence of pale flecks on the mantle and incomplete wing molt. One image included both birds. After less than ten minutes the skuas vanished into the mist but were quickly replaced by a 1st-summer Pomarine Jaeger (*S. pomarinus*), following

the same route as the other jaeger/skuas and settling on the choppy surface of the pond next to the Parasitic Jaeger. At least two other South Polar Skuas were found on this day, one of which was submitted to the Committee (NYSARC 2011-47-A).

**Long-tailed Jaeger (*Stercorarius longicaudus*)**

**2011-151-A** One, Braddock Bay, **Monroe**, 16 Jul (Christopher L. Wood, ph Sam Barry)  
This near-adult Long-tailed Jaeger was seen by 5 observers from a boat on Lake Ontario. After a tantalizing initial sighting, they were able to get closer and definitively identify it to species. The jaeger was periodically harassed by Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) but came within 40 meters of the boat, which contained two extremely experienced birders and, luckily, at least one camera. Using just a wide-angle lens, identifiable photos were obtained. Together with an extremely detailed write-up, these made for a completely compelling report.

**Le Conte's Sparrow (*Ammodramus leconteii*)**

**2011-1-B** One, Calverton Grasslands, **Suffolk**, 8 Jan (Thomas W. Burke, ph Gail Benson)  
The committee received an additional report, with photographs, from the original finders of a Le Conte's Sparrow present at the Calverton Grasslands on 8-9 Jan. See the discussion under submission NYSARC 2011-1-A in the 2011 Annual Report for further details.

## **2010 Reports Accepted**

**American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)**

**2010-104-A** One, Setauket Harbor, **Suffolk**, 29 Dec (Peter Scully)

This species is now considered a scarce migrant to upstate NY, especially in the spring, but remains significantly rarer in coastal areas. This individual was discovered by participants on the Smithtown Christmas Bird Count and correlates with a handful of late fall and winter sightings across the Northeast. Although spread over hundreds of miles, there is some evidence for the same birds giving rise to multiple observations.

**Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)**

**2010-64-D** One, private residence on Rt 50, Town of Ballston, **Saratoga**, 24 Oct (Robert P. Yunick)

The committee received an additional report of a Rufous Hummingbird that spent most of Oct 2010 at a feeder in Ballston Spa. In the new report certified hummingbird bander Robert Yunick described capturing the hummingbird and provided a series of measurements that support the identification as Rufous rather than Allen's (*S. sasin*) Hummingbird.

**"Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys gambelii*)**

**2010-105-A** One, private residence on Langley Rd, Amsterdam, **Montgomery**, 4 Oct (Robert P. Yunick)

This "Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow was trapped and banded. Details of

the bill color and face pattern, as well as the longer wing chord measurement, ruled out the regular *Z. l. leucophrys* subspecies. For reasons that are not entirely clear, this western subspecies is encountered far less frequently away from Long Island.

## **2012 Reports Not Accepted**

### **Pacific Loon (*Gavia pacifica*)**

**2012-24-A** One, Derby Hill, Oswego, 6 May

Details on a Pacific Loon flying by Derby Hill were fairly brief and left several members of the Committee uncomfortable that neither Common (*G. immer*) nor Red-throated (*G. stellata*) Loon had been adequately eliminated. There was significant emphasis placed on behavior (head not held lower than body) and size (too large for Red-throated Loon). While flight style is an excellent way to find a potential candidate for Pacific Loon, several members felt there was too much emphasis on this and too little discussion of appearance. Other flight style characters were not mentioned, and the reliance on size also caused concern, since there is considerable overlap in length, wingspan and weight between Red-throated and Pacific Loons. Additional concerns stemmed from the Committee's uncertainty about how well the bird was seen, as distance and height were not mentioned. In the end, the Committee thought there was a reasonable chance that this could have been a Pacific Loon, but there were not enough details provided in the report to make it fully convincing.

### **Cape Verde Shearwater (*Calonectris edwardsii*)**

**2012-39-A/B** One, off Field 2, Robert Moses SP, Suffolk, 2 Jun

Passage of a coastal storm produced a very strong inshore movement of Sooty Shearwaters (*Puffinus griseus*) along with smaller numbers of several other seabirds, including (in descending order of abundance) Cory's Shearwater (*C. diomedea*), Great Shearwater (*P. gravis*) and Manx Shearwater (*P. puffinus*). Viewing conditions were less than ideal, with a heavy overcast, light drizzle and associated haze. During the watch an intriguing shearwater was spotted moving by from west to east, the prevailing direction of the day's flight. The observers estimated that at closest approach the bird was only 250-275 yards away and provided about a minute's worth of observation. It was described as being more similar to a Cory's Shearwater, but appearing distinctly dark-capped like a Great; its bill was slim and lacked the yellow base evident on many of the Cory's, this visible depending on their distance, as some were notably farther out. Seven observers were present but only two supplied reports. The photographs show a seabird, but it is difficult to identify it as a shearwater. A chief strength of these two reports is the caliber of the observers, each familiar with Cory's and Great Shearwaters, but unfortunately none of the observers had prior experience with Cape Verde Shearwater. Overall, the Committee felt that while this was a provocative sighting, the documentation fell short of what is required for a firm identification. The views were just too brief and distant to

support the unambiguous identification of this bird as a Cape Verde Shearwater, an exceptional rarity to North America (North Carolina and Maryland) and potential new addition to the NYS Checklist.

**Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)**

**2012-23-A** One, Derby Hill, **Oswego**, 2 May

**2012-68-A** One, Hook Mountain, Clarkstown, **Rockland**, 30 Aug

Both of these reports were fairly detailed and came from experienced hawk watchers viewing from traditional vantage points. While the dates and circumstances seemed very plausible, and with several compelling details in favor of Mississippi Kite in both instances, several Committee members noticed some details that seemed to directly conflict with identification as this species. The difficult lighting encountered during the Hook Mt. sighting could have contributed to some of these issues relative to the description of the coloration and patterning of the bird.

**Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)**

**2012-71-A** One, Chestnut Ridge Hawk Watch, Bedford, **Westchester**, 11 Sep

This was a bird seen at a considerable distance (estimated at 3 miles), and the report lacked some details important to the identification, which hinged on the wings being held in a strong dihedral together with a couple of plumage details that are not on their own diagnostic of Swainson's Hawk. Thus it was felt that the bird was not seen well enough to firmly establish the identification of a species that remains very rare in the southern half of NYS.

**Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*)**

**2012-26-A** Two, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, **Seneca**, 16 May

This report of two Wilson's Plovers in the far interior of NYS was reasonably detailed, but the observers did not realize the magnitude of the rarity either at the state level or for that location. The presence of two individuals would be exceptional even along the coast of Long Island. Unfortunately, there were no photographs to accompany this report, and the description of the birds lacked sufficient detail to substantiate a sighting of this caliber.

**Marbled Godwit (*Limosa fedoa*)**

**2012-109-A** One, Partridge Run Golf Course, Canton, **St. Lawrence**, 13 May

This report came from a very experienced observer, but under very difficult circumstances. A loudly vocalizing large shorebird flew over and past the observer before dropping down into some sewage ponds that could not be accessed. Unfortunately, the bill shape was assessed only after the bird was already flying away. The observer readily acknowledged the bad viewing angle and the brevity of the sighting. For these reasons, the Committee did not feel that a firm identification could be established and conjectured that Long-billed Curlew (*Numenius americanus*) remained as an alternative possibility.

**Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)**

**2012-66-A** One, Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, **Seneca**, 24 Aug

This shorebird was viewed by a single observer at the Knox Marcellus Marsh, and though extremely compelling in most respects, the Committee decided, in the 2nd round of voting, that the report was not quite substantial enough. Juvenile Curlew Sandpiper would be highly unusual at this date, and some on the Committee felt that Stilt Sandpiper (*C. himantopus*) was still a lingering possibility.

**Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*)**

**2012-114-A** One, Madison County Landfill, **Madison**, 7 Dec

This sighting involved a gull in first-winter plumage, standing among several Herring (*L. argentatus*) and Great Black-backed (*L. marinus*) Gulls at a landfill. The brief description was accompanied by two photos, which showed the bird in essentially the same pose but with different gulls around it available for comparison. The bird's relatively small size, rounded head, and small dark bill were apparent in the photos, as were the very dark tertials and folded primary tips. The bird's size and structure indicated to the observer that it must be a Thayer's Gull or Kumlien's Iceland Gull (*L. glaucoides kumlieni*) and that the very dark primary tips ruled out a nominate Iceland Gull (*L. g. glaucoides*). However, size variation among the large gull species is considerable, and several Committee members felt that a small Herring Gull was not ruled out. In the photos, the very dark primary tips showed none of the pale edgings that should be quite evident on a first cycle Thayer's Gull. This could have been due to the photos being underexposed, but, without a description of these feathers, the Committee could not know this. In addition, the bird had already molted out its juvenile scapulars and replaced them with first basic feathers. This would be very unusual for a Thayer's Gull at this early date, 7 Dec, as that species tends to retain many of its juvenile scapulars well into the winter. As a result of these considerations, the Committee decided that the record could not be fully supported by the documentation submitted.

**Rufous Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*)**

**2012-73-A/B** One, private residence on E. 7th Street, Manhattan, **New York**, 16 Sep

Two reports of this bird at a feeder gave sufficient evidence that this was a hummingbird, and the overall color suggests that this was either an immature or a female, but none of the information provided could reliably assign this bird to a specific species. The observers did indicate that they thought this might be a Rufous Hummingbird, but the Committee was not able to substantiate that claim.

**Gyr Falcon (*Falco rusticolus*)**

**2012-14-A** One, Wrights Landing, Oswego, **Oswego**, 18 Jan

Another report that quite possibly does refer to the species in question, though this was a very brief sighting. While the observer pointed out that it was not a

Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrinus*), little detail was provided as to why it was not. The couple of field marks mentioned, including facial pattern, can be difficult to accurately assess on a moving bird over such a short duration, and some Peregrine Falcons can have exceptionally similar appearances to what was described. In the 2nd round of voting, the Committee decided that there was not enough in the report to substantiate the identification.

**Cassin's Kingbird (*Tyrannus vociferans*)**

**2012-37-A** One, Sterling Forest SP, **Rockland**, 27 Jun

The Committee felt that the brevity of both the viewing time and description raised significant concerns about the identification of what is an exceptionally rare kingbird in the northeast. In particular, the details needed to separate Cassin's from the far more likely Western Kingbird (*T. verticalis*) were missing. The midsummer date would also be unusual for any of the yellow-bellied kingbirds.

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**Submitted on behalf of the New York State Avian Records Committee:**

Angus Wilson (Chair), Gary Chapin (Secretary), Thomas W. Burke, Willie D'Anna, Doug Gochfeld, Andrew Guthrie, Dominic F. Sherony, Christopher L. Wood and Jeanne Skelly (Past Secretary).

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This Grace's Warbler was found at Point Lookout, *Nassau*, on 1 Jan 2012, during the Southern Nassau County Christmas Bird Count. Not only a first for New York State, it was also the first for the Northeast and just the second for eastern North America. See details concerning this and many other notable records reviewed by the New York State Avian Records Committee, pp 178-210. Photo © Lloyd Spitalnik.