

GENERAL NOTES

Sight Records of European Raptors at Cape May Point: On October 24, 1978, during one of the most impressive hawk flights of that fall, a European Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*), was reported at Cape May Point by Alfred Nicholson, Peter Dunne, and Clay Sutton. The bird soared over the hawk watch for a total of five minutes, at one point as close as 70 feet. One photograph was obtained. Initially identified by Alfred Nicholson, the others concurred with this determination as the Sparrowhawk reappeared to allow further study.

Presumably an immature female, the bird was generally dark chocolate in color, heavily barred on the body and wings, and showed an extremely long tail. It is this distinctive plumage of the immature (*Accipiter nisus*) which we believe makes it separable in the field from a Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), or even from a melanistic sharp-shin, should one occur.

The hawk displayed a remarkably falcon-like flight, bouncing around on the northeast winds of the day, noticeably behaviorally different than the many Sharp-shinned Hawks and Cooper's Hawks which appeared the same morning.

A typical accipiter, widespread throughout Europe, the European Sparrowhawk is known to be highly migratory. Detailed notes have been submitted to the New Jersey Bird Records Committee, and were published in the Raptor Research Journal of the Cape May Bird Observatory as well. While any sight record for a rarity of this magnitude is problematical, this bird was witnessed by the "required three observers" desired for such rare sightings.

If this sight record is accepted, it will be not only the first New Jersey record for the European Sparrowhawk, but also, according to our research at this time, a first continental record for North America.

The European Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) was identified on at least three separate dates at Cape May Point during the autumn of 1979. First recorded by James Dowdell at the official Cape May Bird Observatory hawk watch on October 9, the bird was directly compared in flight to an American Kestrel stooping on it.

On October 14, a second European Kestrel was seen (considered a second bird due to the fact that the October 9 bird was observed to cross the Delaware Bay). This bird came down the railroad tracks on a northwest wind, and was well seen by Clay Sutton. Probably an immature female, the bird's large size (compared to American Kestrel), dark sub-terminal tail band, and lack of defined moustachial stripe were clearly seen.

Presumably the same bird was seen by Alfred Nicholson and Patricia Sutton the following day, as it soared overhead over the Pond Creek Marsh. This study was leisurely and all field marks were noted.

The first record of the European Kestrel at Cape May was on 9/23/72 when an immature male was banded and photographed for the second continental record. It was not illogical to assume it would appear again, particularly in light of recent research into the appearance of migratory raptors (particularly falcons and accipiters) far at sea, which allows for transportation of these birds by ship to other continents.

With the appearance of the European Sparrowhawk and European Kestrel at Cape May, we can only wonder which European raptor will be the next vagrant to appear on our shores as we continue to solve the incalculable mysteries of the vast raptor concentrations at Cape May.

—Clay C. Sutton, Jr., R.D. 3, Box 7, Cape May Court House, N.J. 08210

Kites at Cape May: On May 30, 1979, a subadult Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) was observed over Cape May Point by Peter J. Dunne, as it hawked insects over the town. Later that afternoon, Clay and Pat Sutton watched two Mississippi Kites soaring together over the Pond Creek marsh just north of Cape May Point. The birds were not seen on subsequent days.

This represents the fourth successive year of Mississippi Kite sightings at Cape May in late May or early June but was the first time two birds were seen together, although at least two and possibly three birds were involved in the 1978 sightings.

The appearance of these kites at Cape May is representative of the continuing range expansion of this species in North America, and it may now be assumed that these birds are not just "vanguard wanderers," but that the Mississippi Kite now probably breeds somewhere in the northeast states. This can be projected in light of the recent article in *American Birds*, Vol. 33, No. 2, "The Recent History and Status of the Mississippi Kite," by Parker and Ogdén: "repeated sightings of adult kites well into the breeding season (especially in more than one year) was sometimes considered adequate evidence for nesting because study of breeding populations showed that virtually all adults attempt to nest during the reproductive season." It also should be noted that: "the social behavior of kites during the non-breeding seasons, especially their ways of forming spring migratory flocks and breeding pairs, could lead to many yearlings and possibly two-year-old birds being recruited into breeding populations far from those where they were produced."

Considering that the Mississippi Kite clearly breeds when one year old, those seen in Cape May are no doubt capable of breeding, and it is possibly only a matter of time before the Mississippi Kite is found nesting in New Jersey.

The Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) was detected twice at Cape May in the spring of 1979. On April 24, Peter Dunne observed a Swallow-tailed moving north over Cape May Point, and on June 12, Clay and Pat Sutton saw a Swallow-tailed come into Pond Creek in late afternoon, riding the northwest winds of a spring cold front. The Swallow-tailed Kite is also known to be expanding its North American range, perhaps hopefully destined to reoccupy its historical range which extended north to the Great Lakes.

There have been many recent Cape May County records for both the Swallow-tailed and the Mississippi Kite, and they are here included. Both species can now be considered rare but regular components of spring hawk movements at Cape May. The spring hawk flight at Cape May, while virtually unstudied, is known to be both sizable and of lengthy duration. Large flights occur well into June, largely composed of immatures and non-breeders. There is a need for a regular spring hawk watch at Cape May, an effort which would no doubt uncover additional kites on their northward migration. It is evident, however, that the Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites are now to be expected at Cape May in the spring, and the Jersey Cape peninsula is the only site north of the Carolinas where they may be seen with seasonal regularity.

CAPE MAY RECORDS OF THE SWALLOW-TAILED KITE

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| June 4, 1893 | "close to the Cape May Co. Line" (in Cumberland Co.), from Bird Studies at Old Cape May, by Witmer Stone | J. Harris Reed |
| Sept. 1, 1946 | Cape May Point | J. d'Arcy Northwood |
| May 12-20, 1972 | Cape May Point, Pond Creek Higbee's Beach | Frank McLaughlin, Alfred Nicholson, et al. |
| June 24, 1975 | Swainton | Jim Akers |
| April 20, 1976 | Cape May Point | Jim Akers |
| April 26, 1976 | Avalon | Dave Ward, Wendy Beard |
| April 30, 1978 | Cape May Point | Gil Cavaliere |
| April 24, 1979 | Cape May Point | Peter Dunne |
| June 12, 1979 | Pond Creek | Clay and Pat Sutton |

CAPE MAY RECORDS OF THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

| | | | |
|------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--|
| May 30, 1924 | Adult | New England Rd. (Higbee's Beach) | Witmer Stone, Julian Potter, William Baily |
| June 3, 1976 | Imm. | Pond Creek | Alfred Nicholson |
| Sept. 29, 1976 | — | South Cape May | David Britton, Peter Grant |
| June 3, 1977 | Subad. | Pond Creek | Alfred Nicholson |
| June 4, 1978 | Imm. | Pond Creek | Alfred Nicholson, Clay and Pat Sutton |
| June 10-11, 1978 | 1 Adult * | Pond Creek | Alfred Nicholson, Clay Sutton |
| | * (probably two—one bird definitely different than 6/4/78 bird). | | |
| May 30, 1979 | 1 Subad. | Cape May Point | Peter Dunne, Alfred Nicholson, Keith Seager |
| | 2 Subad. together | Pond Creek | Clay and Pat Sutton |

—Clay C. Sutton, Jr., R.D. 3, Box 7, Cape May Court House, N.J. 08210

Sandhill Crane at Brigantine Refuge: On October 13, 1979, Henry Dielstein, David Abbott, and I visited Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge at Oceanville, N.J. We made three circuits of the dikes during steady light rain, and on our fourth circuit we waited in the car for an hour for the rainfall to let up. Finally, about 4:00 PM, a clearing appeared in the western sky.

We were looking for small birds in the vicinity of the headquarters parking lot before commencing a fifth circuit of the dikes when I heard a loud strange call, the source of which I could not immediately pinpoint. I happened to look up and see, flying out of the glow in the western sky and about 500 feet overhead, a Sandhill Crane. The three of us saw the bird and heard it call several more times as it continued eastward over the south dike. Other birders pulled up at this time, and we were able to point out the crane to them. When the bird reached the vicinity of the boat house, it veered to the left. By this time the bird was less than 200 feet in the air. The crane flew north and then northwestward, and we finally lost sight of it when it was somewhere in the vicinity of the Peregrine tower near the western end of the north dike.

I heard of no subsequent reports of this Sandhill Crane at Brigantine Refuge. Only a week or so later, however, one was reported in the Tinicum area near the Philadelphia International Airport, and it is entirely possible that that was the same bird.

I know of at least one previous Brigantine Refuge record of a Sandhill Crane. James Meritt informs me that he saw one there on April 5, 1970.

—Robert Augustine, 1080 Little Magothy View, Annapolis, Md. 21401

A Winter Record of the Nashville Warbler in Chester County, Pa.: A Nashville Warbler made daily appearances near an apartment complex in Kennett Square, Chester County, PA from December 22, 1979 through December 26, 1979. The bird was easily observed from an apartment window. Often it was seen about fifteen feet from the window in a dogwood tree. It was also observed on the ground feeding beneath a bird feeder and among the grass in a flower bed. It came to the feeder only when no other birds were present or when some house finches were feeding. It was never seen with birds other than the house finches. A Nashville Warbler was seen on the Gloucester County Count on January 2, 1977 (*American Birds*, July, 1977, p. 528). A Nashville Warbler was also seen on the Westport, Connecticut Christmas Count on December 16, 1978 (*American Birds*, July, 1979, p. 404).

—Horace B. Alexander, 275 Crosslands, Kennett Square, PA 19348

Black-tailed Godwit at the Tinicum National Environmental Center: On October 19, 1979 while taking my weekly shorebird count, I saw a large shorebird in with Greater Yellow Legs (*Tringa melanoleuca*). When I looked at it with 9x35 Bausch & Lomb binoculars, I could see it was a Godwit. My first thought was that it was a Hudsonian, but after looking at it a little longer I could see a little rufous-buff color on its neck, and the bill was long and straighter than a Hudsonian's would be. The tide was coming in fast on these mudflats and it soon flew. When it did I saw that it had white and gray underwings with broad white wing stripes, not dark like the Hudsonian. The bird also had a white rump with a black terminal band. The Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) has blackish axillaries and sooty underwings and the white underwing stripe is less distinct and sometimes almost lacking. After noting the field marks, I recalled the hundreds of Black-tailed Godwits (*Limosa limosa*) I had seen on my first trip to Australia in 1974. I called Keith Richards and Frank and Barb Haas, telling them of my sighting, and asked them to go down to the area and see if they could verify my find. They all found the Black-tailed Godwit and one Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) flying over the area. When the news of this sighting spread, people from all over the country came to the Tinicum National Environmental Center to see if they could find this rare shorebird. There are only a few records for this Godwit in the lower 48 States, and this is the first one for Pennsylvania.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, Pa. 19076

Snowy Egret Nesting in Philadelphia, Pa.: In June 1978, while banding Tree Swallows at the Tinicum National Environmental Center, I saw a Snowy Egret go into some oak trees not far from where I was working. After going over to this area of trees which contains nesting Black-crowned Night Herons, I found three nests of Snowy Egrets. These nests contained eggs. To the best of my knowledge this is the first nesting of this species in Philadelphia, Pa.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, Pa. 19076

Great Egret Nesting in Philadelphia, Pa.: On April 24, 1978, while birding in the Tinicum National Environmental Center I observed a Great Egret in some oak trees where Black-crowned Night Herons rest. Later in the day while birding in that area, I found three Great Egrets on nests in with the Night Herons. I found this Egret nesting in Delaware County three times in the fifties, but this was my first find for Philadelphia, Pa. To my knowledge this is the first nesting of this species in Philadelphia, Pa.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, Pa. 19076

Increased Nesting of Great Black-backed Gulls in New Jersey: While on a banding trip to Stone Harbor, New Jersey, I found six nesting Great Black-backed Gulls. Three were on a small island out in the salt marshes. There the Black-backed Gulls were nesting with Herring Gulls. Out of these three nests I banded six young ones, and found a large young dead. I first found this bird nesting in 1966 at Absecon Bay, New Jersey. That year I found two nests in that area. Today you can find between ten and twenty pairs nesting in the Absecon Bay area. This bird is becoming a common nesting bird in New Jersey.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, Pa. 19076

American Coot Nesting in the Tinicum Area: In 1978 I found two nests of Coots in the Tinicum Wildlife Refuge, Philadelphia, Pa. These are my 12th and 13th nests of this species in the refuge. The eggs were hatched in both nests. These nests were found in May and June. Later in July I found one more American Coot's nest in a small marsh in back of the Philadelphia Airport. The young were already out of the nest. I caught three of the young and banded them. This species is not a common breeding bird in this area. All of these nests were in Philadelphia County, Pa.

—John C. Miller, 1220 Prospect Avenue, Prospect Park, Pa. 19076



BLACK-TAILED GODWIT

Photographed by Alan Brady at
Tinicum National Environmental Center,
Philadelphia, PA on October 25, 1979

Cerulean Warbler Nest in Roxborough, Pa.: Cerulean Warblers have been heard and seen in May along the Wissahickon Creek between Bell's Mill Road and the Red Covered Bridge for many years. On May 12, 1978 while leading a bird hike we discovered a pair of Cerulean Warblers building a nest in a Black Birch (*Betula lenta*) about fifty feet high and twenty feet from the trunk on a horizontal branch.

A pair of Red Squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) with three young were nesting in a hole in a Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*) about 45 feet high. Even though the squirrels were in the next tree, the Cerulean nest was successful.

—Charles A. Wonderly, 451 Flamingo St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19128

Arctic Tern Sighting at Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge: On August 14, 1979 at 2:30 p.m. under ideal lighting conditions, one, possibly two *Sterna* type terns having the field marks of the Arctic Tern were observed in company of 8 or 10 Common Terns at the Brigantine National Wildlife Refuge, Oceanville, N.J. The terns were leisurely feeding in the area paralleling the inner edge of the eastern dike of the east pool. As the terns approached from the north and slowed their flight, the lighting was ideal for studying the translucence of the midsection of the primaries and observing carefully the narrow, black line marking the terminal edge of the first 8 or 9 primary flight feathers. The straight, rather short blood red bill without any sign of a black tip was also distinctly seen by all three observers in my car. The larger size of the Arctic Tern as seen flying closely with a Common Tern was evident. All points of distinction drawn between the two species of terns by Russell in 1976 (*Birding*, Vol. 8, 234-237 and 247, 248) were noted. There was much feeding activity by the terns at the time of the first observation and in my efforts to point out the field marks of the Arctic Tern as displayed in our field guides to our young companion, I lost sight of the initial bird sighted. However, during the ten minutes the terns were in sight two or three sightings of individual Arctic Terns were made. It is speculated that the Arctic Tern(s) seen were blown inshore by the strong northeast winds blowing off the New Jersey coast on August 12 and 13.

My companions in this observation were my wife Thelma (37 years birding experience) and 17 year-old David MacGregor, an enthusiastic young naturalist of Sewell, N.J. Although they understood that the Arctic Tern at this location would be accidental, they urged that our observation be reported to the refuge headquarters and this was done.

—William R. Middleton, 109 S. Jackson Ave., Wenonah, N.J. 08090

Great Number of Common Gallinules in Salem County, N.J.: On September 10, 1979 while enroute to a 2:00 p.m. meeting in Salem, N.J., my wife and I found ourselves with 20 minutes to examine the Mannington Creek and meadows for water birds. At the Sharptown-Salem road crossing no birds were seen so we passed north of the meadows to State Route 540. Crossing the meadows on this route (1½ miles north of Pointers, N.J.) we were amazed to see the extensive shallows to the east which was choked with duckweed thickly populated with Common Gallinules. These birds were seen where the duckweed appeared as mats unobscured by the scattered growth of spatterdock and rose mallow. Using 7X binoculars, we attempted, over a period of 10 minutes, to count the gallinules. The area examined covered the full width of the meadows and extended from 100 yards to at least ½ mile to the east. No gallinules or duckweed were seen to the west. Our independent counts agreed at 95 ± 5 of which only one was noticed with the adult red frontal shield. Many of the birds were too distant to see this detail. Intervening islands and peninsulars of spatterdock and rose mallow blocked much of the view so we estimate that we saw no more than 75% of the gallinules present. Miller (*Cassinia* 1946:6) reports that Spinner saw 80 gallinules on a 100 acre pool at Bombay Hook, Del. in Aug. 1946. I have asked persons familiar with the gallinules of Gloucester and Salem counties and none could recall the sighting of numbers approaching 100.

—William R. Middleton, 109 S. Jackson Ave., Wenonah, N.J. 08090

Mourning Warbler in Chester County, Pa.: On 26 October 1979, I observed a small party of birds as I was walking in Longwood Gardens. Among the sparrows and kinglets was a warbler. After noting that it had a trace of a whitish eye-ring and that its underparts were yellow, I determined that it was a mourning warbler. This was confirmed after consultation with appropriate field guides. This is a very late record of this particular migrant.

—Horace G. Alexander, 275 Crosslands, Kennett Square, PA 19348

Late Summer Call Response of Barred Owls in Northern Pennsylvania: Although finding owls by means of vocal or tape-recorded calls is frequently employed by ornithologists, the actual utility of the technique is but poorly defined for most owl species. I investigated usage of this technique for determining location and responsiveness of Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) in Susquehanna County during August, 1979. A study route of 45 miles was established with calling stations at one-mile intervals. Beginning on 11 August, the route was censused a total of five times, with a one-day interval between each census. Duration of calls at each station was limited to nine minutes. Barred Owl responses were heard at six stations (13.3% of total stations) in the first two censuses, increased to nine stations (20%) in the third census, and dropped to five stations (11.1%) and three stations (6.7%) in the fourth and last censuses respectively.

Results suggest that Barred Owls exhibit good initial response to playback of tape-recorded calls in late summer, and underline the validity of this technique for determining initial location of owls. The sharp decline in response in the latter censuses suggests that Barred Owls may accommodate to the taped calls. This is further reinforced by observed changes in duration of Barred Owl calling response, which averaged between six and nine minutes per owl on the first two censuses, but dropped off to but three minutes on the last census.

—Dwight G. Smith, Biology Department, Southern Connecticut State College,
New Haven, CT 06515



NORTHERN SHRIKE

Photographed by Alan Brady
on January 10, 1979 in Princeton, New Jersey



NORTHERN FULMAR

Photographed by Alan Brady on
May 26, 1979, 80 miles off of
Barnegat Light, New Jersey



BLACK-HEADED GULL (IMMATURE)

Photographed by Alan Brady at
Manasquan Inlet, New Jersey
on January 14, 1979