

# Sightings

BY RICK WRIGHT

## Mid-September to mid-November

PHENOMENA: RBA compilers on both coasts and inland were calling it “the year of the buffy,” with juvenile **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** found in unusual, perhaps encouraging numbers, counts exceeding 60 at some mid-Atlantic sites. East coast observers found record numbers of **Connecticut Warblers** from Maine to Florida. And **Cave Swallows** made one of their most impressive fall showings yet, with birds inland to Indiana and over 600 in western New York and Ontario in early November. For detailed analysis of these and other exciting reports, subscribe to the ABA’s richly illustrated journal of ornithological record, *North American Birds* ([americanbirding.org/pubs/nab](http://americanbirding.org/pubs/nab)).

## Southeast

Apparently the first ever for the Atlantic seaboard, a **Neotropic Cormorant**, discovered in August, lingered into November in Maryland and Virginia. Hurricane Rita in September brought Royal and Sooty Terns and Magnificent Frigatebirds to northern Louisiana, while an injured Purple Gallinule was in Kentucky September 23. Florida’s **Lesser Sand-Plover** departed ahead of the storm; that state’s Viera Wetlands in mid-November hosted two American Golden-Plovers, scarce at any season south of the mid-Atlantic. Maryland birders in October found a Curlew Sandpiper and a Ruff. A **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** reported from Orangeburg, South Carolina, will be the state’s second if accepted. Georgia’s Black-headed Gull remained on Tybee Island through October. Franklin’s Gulls were seen in small numbers from Virginia to Florida, while an adult Sabine’s Gull was notable on the Potomac River in late September.

Western passerines this season included an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Alabama in October, while an *Empidonax* netted in that state October 13 was of the “Western” complex. Western Tanagers were found in Florida in mid-September, and Black-throated Gray Warblers in October and November; another of that species was in Maryland in mid-October, its brief stay overlapping that of a Gray Kingbird.

## Northeast

October’s Hurricane Wilma brought southern seabirds north, including 3 Magnificent Frigatebirds, Black Skimmers, and Royal and Sandwich Terns in Nova Scotia, where birders also found at least one Franklin’s Gull, hundreds of Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Cave Swallows, thousands of Chimney Swifts, and a Say’s Phoebe (after one in mid-September and

before another in mid-November). Massachusetts observers saw some 200 Leach’s Storm-Petrels from shore October 16; Black-legged Kittiwakes found themselves fog-bound on western Massachusetts reservoirs. Pending acceptance, a **Black-capped Petrel** reported from Cape Ann, Massachusetts, October 28, was an outstanding find.

A Brown Booby was off Cape May September 16. A month later, a Northern Gannet was found moribund in Schuylkill Co., Pennsylvania. Frigatebirds (most, presumably, Magnificents) were widely reported this fall, with several in Delaware and New Jersey as late as the second week of November, at the same time as a Purple Gallinule wandered north to Massachusetts. White Ibis strayed to Pennsylvania and New Jersey in late September—including an unexpected individual over the Montclair Hawkwatch. Ottawa observers reported 32 species of waterfowl, including Cackling, Greater White-fronted, and Ross’s Geese.

Six American Avocets were in Scarborough, Maine, in early November, with a Black-necked Stilt in Nova Scotia at the same time. A “Common” (Mew) Gull arrived in Newfoundland September 25, and a Little Gull was in New Hampshire mid-month. A California Gull was on Lake Erie in Pennsylvania and Franklin’s Gulls in New Hampshire and Rhode Island in mid-November. Sabine’s Gulls were reported inland in Ontario, Vermont, and Rhode Island in September, while a beautifully photographed **Black-tailed Gull** on Vermont’s Lake Champlain shore drew birders and media attention alike during its week-long stay in October and November.

“Western” hummingbirds have become more diverse in the region in the last decade. Along with widespread reports of Rufous (and unidentified Rufous/Allen’s) Hummingbirds, this season saw an immature male **Calliope Hummingbird** on Maine’s Monhegan Island, a first state record if accepted.

A **Gray Kingbird** near Rochester in early October will be western New York’s first, if accepted; a Fork-tailed Flycatcher was on Quebec’s Gaspé Peninsula October 29, and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was found in southern Maine October 31. A **Bell’s Vireo** banded in Massachusetts in late October will be the state’s first. Southern parulids included multiple Prothonotary, Prairie, and Worm-eating Warblers in Nova Scotia in September. From the west,

a Black-throated Gray Warbler tarried in south coastal Maine in early November, with Townsend’s Warblers reported from New Jersey, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland. A **MacGillivray’s Warbler** was in Ipswich, Massachusetts, November 1, followed a week later by a startling western “invasion” including two



Black-tailed Gull. Photo © Rich Ennis.

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Townsend's Solitaires on Cape Cod and an Ash-throated Flycatcher and a **Sage Thrasher** at Plum Island. A Bohemian Waxwing was at Truro the same weekend. Mid-September found as many as 3 Clay-colored and 3 Lark Sparrows in southern Maine; a Lark Bunting at Scarborough will be the state's 8th record if accepted. Brier Island, Nova Scotia, harbored more than 30 Dickcissels October 19, and at least two White-winged Doves appeared in the province that same month. A **Golden-crowned Sparrow** was in New Brunswick in mid-October.

### Midwest

Seabirds were the big news early in the season. Potentially the second North American record, a **Lesser Frigatebird** was reported on Lake Erie near Detroit September 11, with a bird identified as a **Magnificent Frigatebird** in Iowa a week later. Michigan's first **Gull-billed Tern** was photographed in September at Point Mouillee, followed the next day by an Anhinga. Iowa's potential first **Royal Tern** was present for several days in mid-September, while Arctic Terns were being reported from Duluth. A month later and from a different ocean, an **Ancient Murrelet** was at Whitefish Point October 14; a Northern Gannet visited Michigan in early November. A Harlequin Duck was seen in North Dakota in early October; a Pomarine Jaeger was photographed in Iowa at the end of the month.

A Ruff was in Dayton, Ohio, in late October, and two White-rumped Sandpipers, very rare inland in fall, were reported from North Dakota October 29; two Curlew Sandpipers were in Fargo mid-month. Two Little Gulls lingered at least two weeks in Missouri in late October and November; the species was also reported in Iowa, along with a Black-headed Gull. A Northern Hawk-Owl in Minnesota's Roseau Bog October 10 was the first northern owl of what one hopes becomes "the season."

A **Costa's Hummingbird** was photographed at a feeder in Nemo, South Dakota, September 9. Iowa's first **Green Violet-ear** was last seen October 4 (see "Birding Landscapes" in this issue).

A **Gray Kingbird** discovered in Indiana November 5 was potentially that state's first, as was a Eurasian Tree-Sparrow in Michigan; the latter state also hosted a Couch's or Tropical Kingbird in late October. Potentially Missouri's first, a **Cave Swallow** was reported in Platte Co. September 7. A Townsend's Solitaire was near Chicago October 29, two weeks after a Varied Thrush arrived in St. Louis. A Black-throated Gray Warbler was north and east of its normal range in St. Louis Co., Minnesota, in October; a Common Ground-Dove was in Two Harbors at the same time. A Blackpoll Warbler, currently on the state's "hypothetical" list for fall, was carefully observed in Missouri in early October. A Pine Grosbeak reported in Iowa in October was record-early for this species, and the first reported for the state in 8 years.

### Texas

A Greater Flamingo seen in Calhoun and Aransas Cos. had been banded at the Yucatan's Ria Lagartos Biosphere Preserve. Other tropical visitors included as many as 3 Yellow-green Vireos at the Sabal Palm Sanctuary and a **Streak-backed Oriole** in El Paso September 16, the latter the state's second record in a year. A male Rose-throated Becard was in the lower Rio Grande Valley October 7, and Sulphur-bellied Flycatchers were recorded mid-September from Galveston and Laguna Atascosa. A Fork-tailed Flycatcher at Austin's Hornsby Bend lingered nearly a month after its mid-September arrival. "Mangrove" (Yellow) Warblers—a recent addition to the state's breeding avifauna—were found on South Padre Island in late October, and an Audubon's Oriole was reported to be patronizing a feeder some 130 miles north of Houston in early September.

From the other direction, a Cassin's Vireo and a Steller's Jay were found in Lubbock in October. Varied Thrushes were noted that month in Sabine Woods and on Galveston. A Little Gull appeared in Garland mid-November.

### Southwest

Colorado is making it ever harder to apply the word "pelagic" to many species typically thought of as seabirds. An **Arctic Loon**, the second ever in interior North America, was photographed at Chatfield State Park September 28—impressively, neither that bird nor the state's two Yellow-billed Loons was a first state record. All three jaeger species appeared in September, with a Pomarine still present November 9. Also more typically coastal, Red Knot, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and Curlew Sandpiper were found in mid-September at Prewitt Reservoir; Red Phalaropes were reported from Washington and Crowley Cos. in early September. Bonny Reservoir hosted a Red-shouldered Hawk in September, and Bent Co.—always good for a surprise—was the location for a Neotropic Cormorant in early November.

September also found a Parasitic Jaeger in Utah and a Long-tailed Jaeger in Colfax Co., New Mexico, earlier that month; a Little Gull was in New Mexico September 18. One of the best birds of the season, a **Wandering Tattler** spent four days in Box Elder Co., Utah, in mid-September.

Ruddy Ground-Doves seemed poised for a good winter showing in Arizona; one was also reported from New Mexico's Bosque del Apache in late October. An Aplomado Falcon was in Eddy Co., New Mexico, October 31; for a thorough update on the species' status there, see the latest issue of *North American Birds*.

In Arizona, a Carolina Wren was seen and (more often) heard in the Chiricahuas through September and October. An **Eared Quetzal** first seen and heard October 11 in Cave Creek Canyon was even more elusive, with many days intervening

between detections. Ash Canyon in the Huachucas hosted a Rufous-backed Robin for several days in October. Before the species set out on its outlandish wanderings this summer, a White-eared Hummingbird in the White Mountains in mid-September would have been considered far to the north. A **Streak-backed Oriole** was found near Phoenix in early November; the same site was frequented by a Groove-billed Ani.

From the east, a Tennessee Warbler spent most of October at Tucson's Sweetwater Wetlands; normally coastal in distribution, a **Heermann's Gull** was found at Arizona City October 28.

## West Coast

Pelagic birders continued to make discoveries this fall. After a great summer for the species, two **Short-tailed Albatrosses** were seen off Coos Bay, Oregon, September 10; Cook's Petrels were found there mid-month. A **Parkinson's Petrel** was photographed at Cordell Bank October 1, with another reported 30 miles west of Lane Co., Oregon, October 22. A "**Dark-rumped**" Petrel was reported off Monterey Bay, California, September 17; recently split into Hawaiian and Galapagos Petrels, this complex is extremely difficult to identify, but some observers feel strongly that this individual was a Hawaiian. A **Streaked Shearwater** graced the same area a week earlier. A Manx Shearwater off Monterey Bay September 23 added to the rapidly growing number of records from the eastern Pacific. A Red-billed Tropicbird between San Diego and San Clemente Island was said to be the first there for some years.

Back ashore, Delta, British Columbia produced a Bar-tailed Godwit and a juvenile **Little Stint** September 21; Grays Harbor, Washington's, two Bar-tailed Godwits were joined by a Hudsonian Godwit later in the month. A **Curlew Sandpiper** was found there September 10. An astounding apparent **Temminck's Stint** photographed at Ocean Shores, Washington, in November would be only the second on the continent away from Alaska.

California reports of single Yellow-crowned Night-Herons came from Marin Co., Mission Viejo, and Tijuana Slough in October and November. A Crested Caracara continued in Santa Cruz, while a Zone-tailed Hawk returned to Santa Barbara for a 13th winter; both species were also found in El Centro during the period.

Passerines from the east—and the far east—put on a good show in California. A Sulphur-bellied Flycatcher was in Summerland in early October, as Tropical Kingbirds were appearing in small numbers along the coast. A Thick-billed Kingbird was found in Wilmington November 10. A White-eyed Vireo September 24 in San Luis Obispo County would furnish a first county record if accepted. A Wood Thrush visited Santa Maria mid-November.

A Sprague's Pipit was in San Francisco September 30; if

accepted, the **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** in Mendocino Co. two weeks earlier will be that county's 400th bird species. An Arctic Warbler, California's 4th, was banded on Southeast Farallon Island September 27. A **Blue-winged Warbler** was reported September 10 from San Francisco, at the same time as individual **Red-faced Warblers** in Los Angeles, Alameda, and Orange Cos. A Prothonotary Warbler was in San Bernardino County in early October, and a rather late Prairie Warbler at Big Sur November 8. A LeConte's Sparrow was in San Bernardino Co. October 11. Debates about origin aside, an adult male Painted Bunting was a colorful sight in Carmel in late September.

A Sedge Wren spent two October days in Vancouver, while a Northern Wheatear was present near Victoria, British Columbia, for much of mid-October. A Sprague's Pipit was at Cape Blanco, Oregon, October 1.

## Northwest

Curlew Sandpipers were seen in October at Oregon's Nehalem Sewage Ponds and near Missoula; if accepted, the latter will be Montana's second. A Sharp-tailed Sandpiper was in eastern Washington October 15, with as many as three near Calgary in late September. The two Sharp-tails at Salmon Arm, British Columbia, September 27 shared the mudflat with 2 Buff-breasted Sandpipers. An Arctic Tern near Fort Peck in early October will be the 7th for Montana, if accepted.

Just as they did last year, Blue Jays arrived at scattered locations in the interior northwest in October. A **Western Scrub Jay** seen in Calgary October 1 will be a first provincial record if accepted. A Bewick's Wren was reported from Bozeman November 1.

Wyoming birders reported a Palm Warbler and a Northern Parula. A Black-throated Blue Warbler appeared in Yakima Co., Washington, in mid-October, with a Prothonotary Warbler at McNary NRW October 20. Oregon's Malheur NWR hosted Tennessee, Blackpoll, Prairie, Black-throated Blue, and **Blue-winged Warblers** in late September. A Scarlet Tanager was seen in Adams Co., Washington, in October.

Alaska's second Eared Grebe was found in Homer September 8. Paul Lehman's September stay at Gambell resulted in the first St. Lawrence Island record of Lesser Scaup, along with mainland oddities such as Warbling Vireo, Townsend's Warbler, and Brown-headed Cowbird. Good numbers of Arctic Warblers and Bluethroats were also recorded. Other notable records included Lesser Sand-Plover, 5 Gray-tailed Tattlers, "Siberian" Stonechat, Siberian Accentor, Sky Lark, Pechora Pipit, Dusky Warbler, and 5 Bramblings; North America provided a **Palm Warbler** and American Redstart, and an especially remarkable **Black-headed Grosbeak**. Seawatching produced spectacular single-day counts of 500,000 Short-tailed Shearwaters and 800,000 Crested Auklets.