

December 2023

Hunting for Habitat: Concord Birds 2013

Cole Winstanley

Jalen Winstanley

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/bird_observer

Recommended Citation

Winstanley, Cole and Winstanley, Jalen (2014) "Hunting for Habitat: Concord Birds 2013," *Bird Observer*.
Vol. 42 : Iss. 3 , Article 4.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/bird_observer/vol42/iss3/4

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by the Searchable Ornithological Research Archive at Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bird Observer by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University of South Florida. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usf.edu.

Hunting for Habitat: Concord Birds 2013

Cole and Jalen Winstanley



Jalen (left) and Cole (right) Winstanley. (All photographs courtesy of the authors.)

The rich tradition of naturalists in Concord is well known. Concord is often used as a study area because it is easy to determine changes that have occurred here from Henry David Thoreau's recordkeeping to the data of the current naturalists who are constantly observing the area. The interest of so many naturalists is no surprise, as the high quality of the natural landscape was recognized as early as 1635, when Simon Willard saw the vast lowland swamps as potentially arable. Later, the same areas would inspire Henry David Thoreau as noted in *Walden*, which influenced Teddy Roosevelt to establish the National Wildlife Refuge System. In 1944, Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge was established, including the Concord unit, which arguably hosts better numbers and diversity of wetland and marsh birds than anywhere else in Massachusetts away from the coast.

Growing up in Concord, we have found it easy to become involved with the seemingly endless world of nature and ecology, surrounded by other naturalists in an environment so rich in nature. We take birding on with a local basis, thoroughly scrutinizing specific patches and documenting the everchanging species and habitats. We have found that, in a day and age when reports spread through the Internet within five minutes of a sighting, the method of Thoreau-ly examining a specific area or habitat and making inferences often takes second place to the popular habit of chasing vagrant or semi-vagrant birds around the state at the first alert. Although we enjoy seeing the rarities, we prefer to see them locally, so that there is greater context around the sighting. For example, the Fieldfare in Carlisle was found barely within the area



Estabrook Woods, near the remains of the saw mill where Thoreau's father worked.

where we bird on a regular basis, and although we both saw it, we agreed that had it not been in our patch, the effort wouldn't have been worth it.

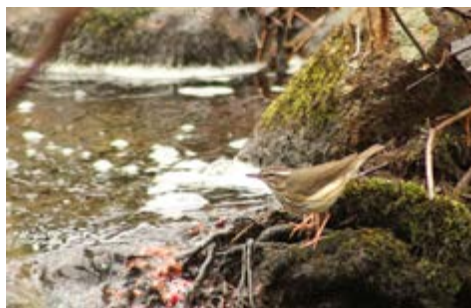
Another important aspect of our birding style is studying the variety of local habitats within a suburban area of the country. The opportunity to formulate hypotheses on how these habitats affect species composition has led us to a great deal of success in Concord. Understanding a bird's habitat, especially breeding habitat, leads to an understanding of how to locate sparse or selective birds. As birding becomes more and more withdrawn from other natural observations, birders think less and less about how birds relate to the environment around them. However observing birds while understanding how and why we are seeing them is one of the most enjoyable parts of birding for us. We especially love to find scarce, habitat-specific birds such as breeding Winter Wrens in obscure wooded wetlands, Bay-breasted Warblers using the canopy of large tracts of woods during fall migration, or Clay-colored Sparrows and Dickcissels that show up in the fall in a semi-wet, weedy habitat. Birders tend to bird where birders have birded before, so new areas, even ones with excellent habitat, are often obscure and underexplored.

From Thoreau to Sibley, Concord birders have displayed an exploratory mentality that has led them to uncover various hotspots in the town that could easily have been overlooked, for example, Kaveski Farm. New locations and unique areas are constantly being uncovered,



Black-billed Cuckoo at nest near Estabrook Woods.

some small and others large, which lead us closer and closer to the birds we have tracked down for countless hours in the field. Our exploratory area is Estabrook Woods, a huge and often overlooked tract of forest in the northern sector of Concord. These woods are sparsely birded due to inaccessibility and the well-known lack of trail maps. Birders surveyed the area frequently in the late 20th century, but now it is only us and a few other Concord birders who consistently uncover new breeding grounds, rare flora that harbor some of the more elusive species—for example Louisiana Waterthrush—and unknown areas such as the multiple springs within the densest areas of the woods. The people who join us in our surveys are locals who, like us, are committed to a heightened understanding of our town and region, how all the pieces of such fragile ecosystems fit into place.



Louisiana Waterthrushes breed in at least three separate locations in Estabrook Woods.



In the summer, Ovenbirds are the most common bird in Estabrook Woods.

These birders were also some of the most valuable contributors to the 2013 Ludlow Project. The project was a yearlong attempt at fully examining Concord as a town, 65 years after Ludlow Griscom—one of America's most influential birders of the 20th century—intensively birded Concord. The project collected all Concord eBird checklists during the year to produce a more comprehensive database than any single observer could achieve.

We'd like to thank David Swain for tirelessly organizing the project; the local experts for their advice, contributions, and for sharing their knowledge; and most importantly, the birders who collectively spent many hours in the field, contributing invaluable to the success of the project. This was a great way to continue Concord's tradition in nature, and we look forward to what Ludlow G. sees in 2014! 🐦

Cole and Jalen Winstanley are teen birders, ages 16 and 14 respectively, who live in Concord. They are focused on birding as locally as possible, and have found over 155 species in their yard alone. As such, they were an integral part of Concord Birds 2013, contributing about a third of the almost one thousand eBird reports. They also had the sole records for a number of species during 2013, such as Sandhill Crane, Louisiana Waterthrush, and the rare Cave Swallow in May at Great Meadows, among others. They frequently discover new areas to bird and share them with the local community; their favorite patches in Concord include Estabrook Woods, Great Meadows NWR, Barrett's Mill Conservation Land, and the Massport 13C trails. More information about the Concord Birds project, including the 2013 results, is available at birdingwithludlow.blogspot.com.