



Bird Notes

From Northeast Kingdom Audubon
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For Immediate Release

Top Ten Long Distance Flyers

One year ago I wrote about the top ten myths about hummingbirds. The migrataion theme comes to mind at this time of the summer, so how about “Top Ten Long Distance Flyers”? After a visit to the Nulhegan Basin National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Brunswick last weekend, I was struck by the new bird migration exhibits. As we know, some birds do not migrate at all, finding shelter and food all year long in the same area. We also know that some birds migrate only short distances. American tree sparrows or snow buntings nest in the far north and winter in the eastern United States. Our commonly seen chipping sparrows, grackles, red-winged blackbirds, eastern bluebirds, American woodcock, and several species of ducks nest much farther south in the United States and Canada. They move south a relatively short distance for the winter to areas along the Gulf of Mexico. My favorite, the ruby-throated hummingbird, winters in Mexico, Central America, and on Caribbean islands, although a few remain in the Gulf States and the Outer Banks of North Carolina. Imagine such a small bird flying over the Gulf of Mexico.

Recent studies have found that some birds endure thousands of miles in the air each year. (1)Number One would have to be the Arctic tern at 11,000 miles for the trip. This bird is the champion globe trotter, nesting as far north as the land extends, and wintering in Anarctica. Few other animals in the world enjoy as many hours of daylight as the Arctic Tern. For these birds, the sun shines most of the day during the nesting season in the northern part of the range, and during their winter sojourn to the south, daylight is almost continuous as well.

Next in line would be the birds that travel to the Caribbean, Central America or northern South America, such as the (2) Cape May warbler, wintering on the island of Hispaniola, West Indies. A trip to Brazil during winter may provide a glimpse of our (3) common nighthawks, (4) barn swallows and (5) cliff swallows all together in the same general area, with some nighthawks and barn swallows venturing even further south. These are the land birds that probably travel the farthest, from the Yukon/Alaska to Argentina 7,000 miles away. Birds such as (6)White-rumped and Baird's sandpipers, (7) Greater Yellowlegs, (8) Ruddy Turnstones, (9) Red Knots, and (10) Sanderlings make even more remarkable journeys, occassionally touching down in our area. Six other shorebird species have been recorded flying ove 8000 miles to Patagonia.

Let's not forget the long distance journey of the monarch butterfly all the way to Mexico. This well documented online at <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch/>

Happy Migratory Bird Watching!



Arctic terns; Source: Wikimedia Commons

Carolyn E. Boardman is a board member of NEK Audubon living in Brownington, Vermont. NEK Audubon is one of 8 chapters of Audubon Vermont and part of the National Audubon Society. NEK Audubon is a non -profit organization that encourages people to enjoy birds, wildlife and natural habitats through field trips, programs and publications. For more information about meetings, field trips and special events visit www.nekaudubon.org. Art work by Robin Rothman.