

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING MIGRATION: APRIL, MAY 1956

About noon on Census Day Allan Klonick pointed out a bush literally filled with warblers; a dozen or more birds of over a half dozen species feeding within inches of the ground and within ten feet of us. As I mentally checked them off — Black-poll, Pine, Palm, Cape May, . . . even Prairie — I was evidently participating in an experience many others shared all over New York State this spring. Regional editors report not only excellent waves of passerine migrants, but also a marked tendency toward exposure. This last feature of the migration allowed many non-birders to experience the esthetic pleasure of watching these brightly colored mites, a pleasure so often reserved to those who wield eight or ten power glasses. This was the spring to take the wife out birding.

Kingbird summaries of the last five years indicate that this was the best state-wide spring migration of the Fifties. Wilson's and Canada Warblers were perhaps most plentiful this year, but in addition to heavy populations of these and other species we had excellent variety. Consider reports of a representative selection of our rarer warblers, Kentucky, Connecticut, Yellow-throated, Orange-crowned and the Brewster's hybrid, since the inception of *The Kingbird*. Here are the number of regional reports of these birds by years: 1951, 8; 1952, 5; 1953, 4; 1954, 12; 1955, 3; 1956, 24. The 1956 breakdown by regions is: Kentucky, 1, 2, 7, 8; Connecticut, 1, 2, 5, 8; Yellow-throated, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10; Orange-crowned, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9; and Brewster's 2, 4, 5, 6, 9. (Others may not have been included with reports.)

With this heavy warbler migration came many Empidonax flycatchers, but whereas the warblers presented easy identification the flycatchers were quite difficult. The lack of song on the part of the warblers was compensated for by the ease of visual identification; this unfortunately was not the case with the flycatchers. We need the "fitz-brew" or "chebek" to identify these extremely similar birds; absence of the calls prevented much identification and hundreds could only be given their generic name. The number of Yellow-bellied Flycatcher reports indicate the larger number of Empidonax.

What were the factors behind this unusual migration? Anyone interested in the answer ought to take the time to read the individual regional reports for all areas of the state, at very least the introductions and the vireo-warbler sections. These reports are excellent, and they show amazing correlation in their analysis of the factors influencing this migration.

Briefly here is the picture. Mild weather never did arrive until late May, with frosts continuing until the last ten days in the month. This weather retarded foliage and insect development. Birds could not filter through the state as they did in 1954 and 1955, however, because of this food deficiency. Migrants which arrived on time could penetrate no farther north, and later waves piled up on these. The food supply which could not adequately support early migrants fell woefully short now. Tree top birds fed at stream side and marsh edge. Tom Lesperance indicates some casualties among Scarlet Tanagers, and suggests that less conspicuous birds may have died unnoticed.

Complete this interesting and complex picture by reading further. GRR.