

REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

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August displayed no sharp variations from the expected values weather-wise. Sep, however, had precipitation 60% above the normal and less than 50% of the anticipated sunshine; a series of E and NE winds, cloudy evenings, and foggy nights Sep 16-19 produced small "tower" kills at Syracuse and Rome (see Warblers). Oct was cool with precipitation and sunshine near normal; a cold snap with NW winds on Oct 11-12 produced a panregional Canada Goose migration, widely noted. Constant wet weather between Oct 22 and 29 was followed by a massive exodus of later migrants, especially sparrows and blackbirds, said exodus being hastened by hard frosts on Nov 1-2; this exodus usually occurs about ten days later. Nov 28-30 brought eight inches of snow and icing of small ponds and marshes with attendant drops in half-hardies and dabbling ducks.

Major features of the fall migration were 1) superb numbers of migrating geese (Oct 11 - Nov 30), dabbling ducks, and sparrows (Sep 27 - Nov 2), 2) excellent shorebirding until mid-Sep (see Shorebird Count), and 3) good fall warbler waves (noted Aug 30 and Sep 5, 8, 13-14, 17, 27-28, most coinciding with day-earlier NW winds). Negatively the season has seen the poorest diving duck migration ever recorded here, very poor counts of loons and grebes, and low numbers of migrant flycatchers, wrens, and hawks. Though most migrants departed on time or even early, some few individuals lingered strikingly late (see Warblers); conversely some winter

visitants (Rough-legged Hawk, Snow Bunting) arrived early, but the majority were on schedule or a bit late. A fair winter finch flight began in late Oct but the numbers of these and of wintering hawks and owls have been quite low.

Fall birding is noted for rare finds and this fall's harvest of rarities included two species of jaegers, two species of phalarope, Marbled Godwit, Little Gull, Purple Sandpiper, and Prairie Warbler.

Loons — Ducks: Red-throated Loon: one to three/day thru Nov, all from Lake Ontario. Horned Grebe: numbers reduced markedly with a high count of 37 (very low) on Nov 23. D-c. Cormorant: singles, Oct 11 and 18, Sandy Pond are the only fall reports. Common Egret: two, Sep 26, Piseco Park in the southern Adirondacks (Aspinwall) is a new species for that area; nine of these birds were present at Howland's Island Game Management Area, Port Byron until Oct 27. B-c. Night Heron: scarce all fall, with one, Nov 2, Hinckley Reservoir, the last (E. Bagg IV).

Whistling Swan: six to 19, Nov 20-30 on the eastern end of Oneida Lake, are most unusual since there is only one other recent (last ten years) fall record; two over Howland's Is. GMA on Dec 4 are probably more of this late flight. Canada Goose: very heavy fall flight with a major movement on Oct 11-12, e. g. 1000 over Marcellus (Spofford), 600 at Sandy Pond where 100 birds are unusual, and 325 at Sherrill, highest single-day count ever recorded there (Nodecker); a second major flight Nov 18-23 with other flocks reported at Syracuse and Skaneateles and up to 1500 near Bridgeport; about 85 wild birds still at Howland's Is. GMA at the end of the period. Snow Goose: with the late Canada Goose flight came reports of 85 Snow Geese at Lewis Point, Nov 16, and 65, Shackleton Point, both Oneida Lake, Nov 20; both records are late and very high in numbers. Blue Goose: an adult shot, Oct 18, Cazenovia Lake, is a first fall record. Brant: small numbers seen Nov 1 to 23, Sandy Pond to Texas; none from Oneida Lake; a flock of 60, Nov 16, over Howland's Is. GMA; an injured bird later crash-landed there and now resides with the breeding stock.

Dabbling ducks migrated thru in large numbers with some favored ponds and marshes holding 1000-2000 birds; this was particularly noted in the marshes from Cicero west thru Baldwinsville, Cato, and Port Byron and in the half-flooded bottomlands of Chittenango Creek south of Bridgeport. Mallard and Black Duck: up to 2000 and 2700 respectively at Howland's Is. GMA on Nov 9; these counts are not as high as last year's but a check of adjacent areas show about 30% higher totals; flocks of 200 to 500 Mallards, Black Ducks, Pintails with a few Redheads, Gadwalls, Shovelers, and an occasional Goldeneye were noted regularly feeding in dry fields of standing corn, this at a time (mid-Oct to early Nov) when aquatic food was still plentiful and accessible (Scheider, Ernst). Gadwall: unreported away from Howland's Is. GMA; peak count there is 20, Oct 22. Pintail: fall numbers up (high of 400, Oct 22) considerably; a Gadwall X Pintail hybrid seen Nov 23, Three Rivers GMA. Green-winged Teal: fall flight from July 26 to Nov 27; peak number is 115, mostly males, Nov 9. Baldpate: flocks up to 500 on various small wildlife marshes at Baldwinsville and Phoenix; strangely scarce all fall at Howland's Is. GMA. Wood Duck: flocks of 40 to 90 at Three Rivers GMA and Skaneateles; a very sharp drop after the frosts of Nov 1-2 but a few present to end of period.

Redhead and Canvasback: literally "crash" species this fall; aside from a flock of 5000 Canvasbacks, Nov 19, Oneida Lake, both species have been reported by the tens and dozens with occasional counts to 100-150 instead of the usual hundreds and thousands; Scaup shared this decline and the Oneida Lake numbers were in the low hundreds rather than in the high thousands. The more common diving ducks thru the season were Common Goldeneye, White-winged Scoter, the two *Mergus mergansers* (both down 50%, however), and Ring-necked Duck. Buffleheads and Oldsquaws very scarce to date; no counts of either above 25.

Black Scoter: one to 20 seen Sep 28 to Nov 8, all Lake Ontario. White-winged Scoter: reported in numbers (60/day) from Lake Ontario and Oneida Lake and up to 50 on the ponds of Howland's Is. GMA to Nov 26. Surf Scoter: date range Sep 27 to Nov 23 but small numbers, one to five/day. Hooded Merganser: high count of 200, early Nov, Howland's Is. GMA; up to 19/day from small wildlife marshes in early Oct.

Hawks — Owls: Fall counts of hawks quite low to date, the drop particularly

marked in the number of migrating Accipiters and wintering Buteos. Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks: late Nov counts from the better areas approximately five and three/day respectively, very low figures compared to 5-yr. average. Rough-legged Hawk: arrival date is Oct 18, two light phase birds, near Sandy Pond. Harrier: fall numbers, though lower than last year, are best counts of all late Nov raptors. Peregrine Falcon: one adult, Sep 6, Sandy Pond and a report of four there in the third week of Sep; **unreported** away from that area. Merlin: six seen along the Sandy Pond dunes, Sep 6 to Oct 11, the last, an adult male, rather late.

Ruffed Grouse: fall counts very low and hunting toll extremely so; the present good seed crop may prevent any sizable winter kill. Pheasant: many very young birds with some too young to fly in the fields at the onset of hunting season, Oct 16.

Shorebirds and their long and wide-ranging migrations always engender excitement and this fall was no exception. The majority of reports stem from Sandy Pond and Delta Lake where low water levels produced extensive sand and mud flats. Oneida and Onondaga Lakes and local marshes suffered from high — and rising — water levels but several local pastures were made transiently attractive by rain-pool formation. A regional Shorebird Count taken Sep 5-7 netted the following totals: 22 species, 715 individuals; Piping Plover 1; Ringed Plover 59; Killdeer 164; Golden Plover 5; Black-bellied Plover 10; Spotted Sandpiper 6; Solitary 3; Greater Yellowlegs 14; Lesser Yellowlegs 47; Knot 1; Pectoral 44; White-rumped 12; Baird's 4; Least 71; Semipalmated Sandpiper 145; Western 5; Red-backed 1; Short-billed Dowitcher 2; Long-billed Dowitcher 2; Stilt Sandpiper 1; Marbled Godwit 1; Wilson's Phalarope 1. Quite noticeable was the sharp drop in shorebird variety and numbers after Sep 13-14 despite continuing good conditions at such favorable areas as Sandy Pond and Delta Lake. Particularly scarce all fall were Ruddy Turnstone (high of four with last date, Sep 14, unbelievably early), Knot (nine on Sep 13, Sandy Pond, is peak), and Red-backed Sandpiper (high is four with departure date Nov 9, early).

Golden Plover: date range is Aug 16 to Sep 28, small flocks of four to eight; no Oct stragglers. Black-bellied Plover: high count is 16, Sep 13, Sandy Pond; few reports away from Lake Ontario; **no Nov** records. Wilson's Snipe: fall numbers quite good in late Sep with a high of 40 in early Oct at Howland's Is. GMA. Spotted Sandpiper: rapid Sep decline with last date Sep 21, an early departure. Solitary Sandpiper: last date Oct 5, one, Sandy Pond is quite late. Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Pectoral Sandpiper: flocks of 70, 60, and 45 respectively at Howland's Is. GMA in late Sep and early Oct following the draining of several large pools there (Ernst); last date for Pectoral is Nov 9, two, same place. Purple Sandpiper: two in winter dress clambering about the willow stumps along the channel of the Sandy Pond Inlet, Nov 1, is the second regional record in five years (Scheider). White-rumped Sandpiper: date range is Aug 9 to Nov 1 (late) with a high of 12, Sep 1. Baird's Sandpiper: 14 birds reported from Aug 26, one at Sylvan Beach, to Oct 11, Sandy Pond. Least Sandpiper: latest date ever is Nov 9, one, Howland's Is. GMA (Wayland-Smith, Paquette, Scheider). Long-billed Dowitcher: one to two reported Sep 7 to 28, all at Sandy Pond; on the latter date, Spofford had a Long-billed and a Short-billed Dowitcher side by side for 20 minutes, an observation described as "the finest field study I've ever achieved with shorebirds". Semipalmated Sandpiper: high count is 400, Aug 31, Sandy Pond; last date, Oct 12, seven, Howland's Is. GMA. Western Sandpiper: last date is Oct 5, two, Sandy Pond. Marbled Godwit: a very tame single seen and photographed Aug 30 to Sep 6, Sandy Pond Inlet is a modern-time regional first (numerous observers). Sanderling: counts of 40 to 100 to mid-Sep, Sandy Pond; one, capable of sustained flight, Nov 27, Sandy Pond is late.

Wilson's Phalarope: one, Sep 7, Sandy Pond is the second regional record in as many years (Nisbet, Scheider, et al.). Northern Phalarope: one, Sep 13, and two, Sep 23, both from Sandy Pond; none away from Lake Ontario.

Pomarine Jaeger: one seen Sep 7, off Sandy Pond Inlet (Nisbet, Scheider, et al.); heavy flight, size of bird, and heavy bill carefully noted. Parasitic Jaeger: four records, all single birds, from Lake Ontario, Sep 6, 7, and 13, Sandy Pond, and Oct 5, Derby Hill near Texas. Careful checks of other points along Lake Ontario would probably show jaegers as rare but regular visitants each fall; at least one jaeger has been noted each fall for the past five years along the eastern end of Lake Ontario. Great Black-backed Gull: adult arrival date is Sep 1, Sandy Pond;

any proof of this species breeding on northeastern Lake Ontario islands to date? Ring-billed Gull: fall numbers at Sandy Pond in the 400-2000 range with exception of 7000 huddled there, Oct 11, during a 45-mph gale. Bonaparte's Gull: very scarce this fall; peak count is 30, Oct 15, Oneida Lake. Little Gull: an adult in winter plumage carefully studied Sep 1, Sandy Pond Inlet, is the **first** regional record (Scheider).

Forster's Tern: date range is Aug 3, one, to Oct 18, four, with a peak of 14 on Sep 27, all from Sandy Pond; none have yet been recorded away from that much favored site. Common Tern: last date at Sandy Pond is Oct 18, two; at Oneida Lake, Nov 9, two.

Mourning Dove: remarkably late is a record of barely flying young being fed on Oct 17 (Seaman). Snowy Owl: none to date. Short-eared Owl: first seen on Oct 18, one flying, one dead, Sandy Pond; none seen subsequently, oddly enough.

Swifts — Shrikes: Chimney Swift: late is one, Sep 27, Sandy Pond (D. Gordon, J. Belknap). R-t. Hummingbird: high count is 14 moving among the jewelweed along the Sandy Pond dunes, Sep 13; last date, Sep 23, Sherrill.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: an adult female seen Nov 3 at Gully Road near Skaneateles (Seaman) is a new regional station. Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Sap-suckers, Blue Jays, Black-capped Chickadees, Red- and White-breasted Nuthatches, Creepers, and both Kinglets arrived in numbers Sep 27-28 in a uniformly sharp wave, noted by weekend and daily (Aspinwall, Rusk) observers alike. This distinct wave, which produced the largest — and last — warbler wave of the season, was preceded by six days (Sep 20-26) of south and southeast winds; the afternoon of the 26th saw the wind shift to the northwest and the following morning the fields and woods were flooded with the above species and an enormous wave of sparrows.

Blue Jay: decreased numbers in the last half of Nov and reports indicate early feeding-station patronage. Tree and Barn Swallows: last noted Nov 7, record late dates for both, at Howland's Is. GMA where they were seen feeding on small white moths thru Oct and early Nov. Red-breasted Nuthatch: no marked fall flight but scattered numbers from Sep 13 to the end of the period. Brown Creeper: one reported spiralling about insulated waterpipes in a Syracuse University zoology classroom, Oct 11 (Peterson). Wrens have been uniformly scarce throughout the fall, quite in contrast to the abundant sparrows, kinglets, and chickadees; the only notable count is 15 Winter Wrens, Oct 18, Sandy Pond dunes.

Catbird and Hermit Thrush: one each, Nov 29, Syracuse appear to be attempting to winter over. Robin: heavy flight (up to 250/day) thru the last week of Sep (central Herkimer County area — Aspinwall) and the first two weeks of Oct with a marked flight on Oct 12. Wood Thrush: a flurry of early Oct records, widely scattered; none after the frost of Oct 6. Veery: last date is Sep 28, three, Syracuse, a few days late. Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets: arrival date for both is Sep 25, Westernville with high counts 75, Oct 18, and 20, Oct 19, respectively; their actions, olive colors, and widespread abundance this fall earned for them the local name, "October Warblers"; the Golden-crowned, however, was very uncommon thru Nov. Pipit: date range is Sep 5 to Nov 3, the latter an early departure date. Gray Shrike: arrival date is Nov 9, an adult, Howland's Is. GMA; **no immatures** recorded to date.

Vireos — Warblers: Vireos were unremarkable except for a good late Sep flight of Blue-headed Vireos.

On Sep 16, 17, 18, and 19, heavy warbler-vireo-thrush flights were heard passing over Syracuse. These four days were noted to have 0% sunshine, little rain, cloudy evenings, foggy nights, and east and northeast winds. These conditions created small but significant tower, air-port, and building kills. Mr. Aspinwall reported on Sep 17 "hundreds of birds seen and dozens killed" in the great searchlight at Rome Air Base and a live Black-throated Blue and a Magnolia in the buildings there were captured and later released. On Sep 16 at Syracuse, numerous dead birds (two-five/block) were noted in downtown Syracuse and immature Chestnut-sided and Magnolia Warblers were captured in a Western Union eighth floor office (Burtt). On Sep 16 a "chip count" atop Syracuse Memorial Hospital produced a record tally of 110/minute (Scheider). On Sep 18 fifteen dead birds were located at the base of the WHEN-TV tower at Syracuse and thirty more there Sep 19, in both cases mostly warblers (nine species), vireos, and *Holycichia* thrushes. Clearing weather and NW winds on Sep 19 abruptly terminated the string of foggy

night time disasters. Details of the meteorological sequent and kill results will appear in a later "KINGBIRD" note.

Fall counts of Ovenbirds, Black-and-white, Tennessee, Yellow, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, Wilson's and especially Black-poll'd Warblers were up considerably; Bay-breasted and Canada Warblers were sharply reduced. Orange-crowned: five records, all singles, the last on Oct 18, Sandy Pond. Several exceptionally late dates were established, thus: Nashville, Oct 2, Westernville; Parula, Oct 19, Sylvan Beach; Yellow, Sep 28, Rome; Magnolia, Oct 15, Westernville; Black-throated Blue, Nov 1, Utica (Bagg); Black-throated Green, Oct 29, Sherill (Nodecker); Hooded, Sep 28, Sandy Pond (Gordon); Redstart, Nov 15-16, Sherill (Wayland-Smith); this bevy of late dates becomes inexplicable in view of the foul weather of late Oct and low temperatures of early Nov. Prairie Warbler: one seen well, Sep 27, Selkirk Shores State Park (Scheider) is a new regional fall record.

Blackbirds — Sparrows: Meadowlark: dozens reported thru last half of Nov would point to a large wintering population. Most "black" Icterids (Grackles, Redwings, etc.) left early in Nov following ten days of rain in late Oct and hard frosts on Nov 1-2. Rusty Blackbird: arrival date is Sep 27; up to 200/day in mid-Oct.

Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak: small numbers of each in the great flood of migrants Sep 27-28; top counts are ten and ten on Sep 25 and Sep 7 respectively; no late Oct stay-overs.

Cardinal: more reports with each season; now found at Selkirk Shores State Park and Verona Beach; singles reported from Sandy Pond — at last! — on Sep 7 (Whites) and from Westernville in late Nov (May). Indigo Bunting: last seen Oct 9, one, Westernville, a bit late. Winter finches trickled thru the region with Pine Siskins arriving in mid-Oct and Evening Grosbeaks on Oct 28; small flocks, four to 25, of these species present to end of the period. No Crossbills, Redpolls, or Pine Grosbeaks to date. Purple Finch: seen in small groups — up to 25/day — Sep 25 to Oct 21; none in late Oct and Nov. Goldfinch: flocks of 30-60/day thru Sep and Oct but no heavy flight comparable to last fall's; notably uncommon throughout Nov.

From Sep 27 to Nov 2, the hedgerows, fields, and brushlots of the Region were alive with sparrows; a brief "spishing" session in such territories would draw out dozens to hundreds (literally) of sparrows all thru Oct. Large numbers of sparrows with lesser numbers of blackbirds were noted in grain patches planted for upland gamebirds at Three Rivers and Howland's Is. Game Management Areas; the many fields of standing corn were also liberally infested with both blackbirds and sparrows. In sharp contrast was the absence of these birds from baited areas (Nodecker's banding traps) and feeders (Aspinwall, Estoff, May). Peak figures thru Oct and Nov, most obtained in two hours or less of birdwatching, were: Savannah—25, Oct 13; Vesper—41, Oct 13; Tree—350, Nov 2; Field—32, Oct 12; White-crowned—55, Oct 18; White-throated—158, Oct 5; Swamp—66, Oct 12; Song—130, Oct 19. Junco and Chipping Sparrow counts, however, seemed average.

Tree Sparrow: arrival date is Oct 21, one Westernville; very scarce in late Nov. Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrows: one and two respectively, all adults, Oct 19, Three Rivers GMA are record late dates but are in keeping with the many late warbler records; careful check of weed fields and sparrow groups will probably show these two species to be regularly present each fall at least until mid-Oct. White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows: first reported on Sep 7 and Sep 28 (late) respectively; last White-crowns on Oct 29, Sherill. Fox Sparrow: date range Oct 8 to Nov 20 with a total of 25 reported, considerably above both this spring's and last fall's counts. Lincoln's Sparrow: total of five, usually singles, observed between Sep 28 and Oct 14. Snow Bunting: first seen on Oct 18, Sandy Pond; small flocks (up to 85/flock) noted to end of the period.

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