

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON AUGUST 16 - NOVEMBER 30

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As a reading of the regional summaries which follow will indicate, the fall season of 1960 was one of the most interesting in recent years. By and large the weather was mild, comfortable, and dry, ideal weather in which to be afield. However, there were sufficient breaks in this trend to provide some good landbird flights. The big weather news, of course, was Hurricane Donna. Donna arrived on September 12, lashing Long Island and eastern New York with heavy rains and winds (and some unusual birds). Although the actual eye of the storm passed some miles east of Montauk Point, it was probably difficult to convince Long Island residents of that fact. At late October snowfall hit northern areas of the state, and on the last two days of November the northwestern region was hit by a severe pre-season snowstorm.

The flight of Canada Geese could be classified only as poor to average, although good numbers were encountered in the lower Hudson Valley; Snow Geese and Blue Geese were infrequently seen. In this respect this year's migration was definitely below last year's standards. The migration of other waterfowl was again discouraging and this year elicited considerable comment on the parts of the several regional editors. The decline in numbers applied particularly to the diving ducks. There were precious few reports of Redheads and Canvasbacks, both of which were on the protected list this season, and mergansers too were generally scarce. We await with great interest the results of January's Federation Waterfowl Count. Of especial note among the individual waterfowl records were several Barrow's Goldeneyes in Region 6 (see field notes section), a European Widgeon, in Region 5 constituting a first record for that inland area, a Harlequin Duck in Region 2, Common Eiders in Regions 1 and 5, and King Eiders in Regions 1, 2, and 5.

During the fall migration shorebirds seem to provide more than their quota of interest, and this fall was no exception. The excellent flight observed in Region 5 has been summarized separately by Fritz Scheider, and his report is included elsewhere in this issue. A Ruff seen there on September 15 was a first record for the region, and local observers speculated whether Donna was responsible for the bird's presence inland. Baird's Sandpipers were observed in several areas, and the Purple Sandpiper was seen in Regions 2, 5, and 7. The Hudsonian Godwit, one of our more spectacular shorebirds and one of our rarest even though it seems to be increasing somewhat in numbers, was reported from Region 5 and 9 as well as on Long Island. The Long-billed Dowitcher, now accorded separate species status by the AOU, was found in Regions 2 and 5. No less than six Red Phalaropes were noted in Region 2, and others were seen in Region 1 and 5. The Northern Phalarope was reported from five of the ten reporting regions, the Wilson's from two.

Most areas mentioned several good warbler flights, something sadly lacking in the 1959 southbound migration. The peak flight appeared to be the one of September 18-19. The relatively mild weather that prevailed during the latter part of the period possibly accounted for several late records,

notably a Yellow-throated Warbler seen in November at a feeder in Region 3, a Parula Warbler seen on November 25 in Region 2, and, perhaps most amazing of all, a Blue-winged Warbler picked up dead in Region 1 on November 30. Also among the late landbirds was a Ruby-throated Hummingbird at Rochester on October 26. The late September and October sparrow flights appeared to be very good.

It was quite evident by November 30 that a big Snowy Owl year was on. These birds were observed in all reporting areas except Region 4 and 9, and most areas had at least several birds. An estimated 19 individuals were present in Region 5. Another northerner which is infrequently recorded in flight numbers is the Red Crossbill, but the widespread reports listed in the regional summaries indicate a big winter for these birds too. There were few White-winged Crossbill reports. Evening Grosbeaks, which had been so common the past few winters, were few and far between, and Common Redpolls, certainly the dominant bird of last year's northern finch flight, were virtually unrecorded, as were Pine Grosbeaks. Red-breasted Nuthatches were scarce in most areas. There were indications that Northern Shrikes might be quite generally disturbed during the winter. Pine Siskins put in a very good showing, again a contrast to the fall of 1959. Snow Buntings were recorded in good numbers, as they were in 1959, and the number of Rough-legged Hawk reports in northern and central counties indicated another good year for those birds. Black-backed Three-toed Woodpeckers were observed in four regions, in some cases quite early, and this could possibly indicate a good winter flight. While it would appear doubtful that we would have one approaching the heavy influx of 1956-57, it could happen. All in all, a most interesting winter appears to be in store. There were no reports of Boreal Chickadees during the fall.

And now to Hurricane Donna. Of the twelve varieties of terns ever reported on Long Island, ten were observed with the passing of the big storm. Those with an exclusive southern flavor included Sooty, Royal, Gull-billed, Caspian, and Sandwich; all five were recorded in unprecedented numbers. The Noddy Tern, which has yet to be recorded in New York State, didn't quite make it. There were two sight records for this bird in New Jersey immediately after Donna, an apparent first record for that state. A Magnificent Frigate-Bird was seen at Babylon on Long Island's south shore, and the presence of a Gray Kingbird at Westhampton Beach on September 18 could also certainly be attributed to Donna. John Elliott's Region 10 summary gives a fine account of some memorable days for Long Island birders.

Among our western wanderers was a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in November on Long Island (see field notes section). While the Western Kingbird is quite regularly seen in fall along the coast, inland records from Regions 1 and 3 are of more than passing interest. The Dickcissel was reported as a November feeder visitor in Region 2 and 5, and there were other reports from Regions 8, 9, and on Long Island. Several Lark Sparrows and a Clay-colored Sparrow were also seen on Long Island.

Other individual records of interest include an unprecedented three Eared Grebes in the Buffalo area, the Little Gull in Regions 1 and 2, the Franklin's Gull in Region 1, the Sabine's Gull in Regions 1 and 10, and the Kittiwake in Region 2. A Gannet was observed in Region 9 in early

October. Southerners reported included a Summer Tanager and several Blue Grosbeaks on Long Island and a Black Vulture in Region 8, all in October. There were no fall observations of Cattle Egrets away from Long Island.

REGION 1—NIAGARA FRONTIER

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Generally mild and pleasant conditions dominated the weather picture during the period. Average temperatures were slightly above normal and precipitation, except for the early part of the period, was below. The most noteworthy weather event, Hurricane Donna, had no appreciable effect on western New York. The first general snowfall occurred on October 24, with a fall of several inches being reported in some southern tier areas. November was very mild until the last two days of the month. It was then that the winter season began. Snow accumulations of over two feet were reported in areas to the north of Buffalo; lesser amounts occurred in the southern tier.

Passerine movements were generally good, particularly during September, when frequent cold fronts caused favorable conditions for landbirds to move into the area in "waves". However, as in the past few years, the numbers of many, perhaps most, species appeared to be lower than formerly. The most notable influx of small passerines occurred September 17-18. The latter day, with its fog and drizzle, was especially good in most areas but particularly so near or at the tops of the higher ridges in the northern Allegheny Plateau section. September 27-28 were also notable dates, reports of a definite influx of thrushes and first reports of typical early October migrants coming from many areas.

In examining the records below, another period, October 21-22, appears particularly outstanding. The most severe cold of the season up to that time and the first killing frost in many localities occurred. Coinciding with this, was the first noticeable influx of diving ducks and scoters, and the first reports of many winter resident species, i.e. Rough-legged Hawk, Pine Siskin, crossbills, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting.

Extreme drought conditions prevailed in many localities. Several observers noted more than the usual number of small landbirds coming to watering trays and lawn sprinklers. Concentrations of landbirds near small inland ponds and lakes appeared greater than usual. Water levels at many of these same ponds, lakes and reservoirs were extremely low, thus resulting in a greater number of shorebird reports than in most years from areas away from the Great Lakes. However, for the same reason many usual resting places for migrant waterfowl during October and November were rendered unsuitable, perhaps the reason for the apparent scarcity of surface feeding ducks and some divers.

Observations of greatest interest include: Eared Grebe, Common Eider, Golden Eagle, Willet, Red Phalarope, Sabine's Gull, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, Western Kingbird, White-eyed Vireo and an extremely late Blue-winged Warbler.

Loons — Ducks: Common Loons were well distributed throughout the area during October and November, probably indicating a good flight. A maximum of 70 was counted on Lake Ontario between Shadigee and Fort Niagara Nov 27 (Axtells). Three Red-throated Loons Nov 20 near Shadigee was the only report (Axtells). A single Red-necked Grebe observed Oct 16 on the Niagara River at Buffalo was the only report (Schaffner). During mid October, Horned Grebes were seen on Lake Erie in unusually large numbers for so early in the autumn. In suitable inland locations they reached normal maximums during the first two weeks of November. The number of Eared Grebe reports was unprecedented. Normally one bird during a season is considered unusual. One was observed well Oct 21 on Lake Erie at Hamburg Town Park (Bourne); another occurred Nov 5 on the west branch of the Niagara River (Thompson et al), and one was studied carefully Nov 20 on Lake Ontario at Shadigee (Axtells). The only Double-crested Cormorants reported were two birds on Lake Ontario near Kuckville Oct 21 (Clark). Common Egrets continued to be scarce during late summer, the latest record being for Sep 5 near Mayville