

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

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JAMES K. MERITT

The fall season was above normal in temperature, due principally to a very warm September in which Buffalo recorded its highest readings (for the month) in 60 years and New York City its highest in about 90 years. Rainfall was below average in spite of the fact that portions of the state were affected by several tropical storms. The remnants of Carla, the hurricane that did so much damage to the Texas Gulf Coast, brought heavy rains to western and central New York at the end of the second week in September. Hurricane Esther nicked the eastern end of Long Island a week later, with winds of over 100 mph being recorded at Montauk. Tropical storm Girda passed northward off the coast the third weekend in October, and although this was never officially a hurricane, it did play a major role in causing the two days of rain, strong northeast winds, and high tides that Long Island experienced. November snowfall was generally light, although the area around Malone received a substantial dosage at the very end of the period, an indication of things to come.

Unlike Donna, its counterpart of 1960, Hurricane Esther was not an ornithologically productive storm. There were apparently no observations within our boundaries of southern "exotics" attributable to it although there were a few elsewhere in the northeast. Esther's route from its spawning ground (or waters) in the tropics to the United States mainland was entirely over open ocean —this in sharp contrast to the circuitous route that Donna had taken along the Greater Antilles, across the Florida peninsula, and *up* the coast.

Most inland areas received quite a bit of rain in late August, followed by a monotonously long spell of dry and warm weather, with Carla's aftermath being the only serious break in the trend. The result was a generally late (up to two weeks) and somewhat dullish landbird migration among the regular transients. There were waves of transients reported in a few areas, but these were not of the strength or extent that we would normally expect and they were by no means the equal of the well-pronounced spring flights. Among the many late dates were a November Barn Swallow in Region 2 and a Warbling Vireo and a Bobolink in Region 3, also in November.

Several regional editors commented also on the sub-par duck, hawk, and shorebird flights, although there was an interesting flight of shorebirds on Long Island as well as some notable single occurrences inland. There was an excellent statewide Canada Goose flight which commenced about October 12 and lasted about a week. The early November Whistling Swan flight was quite marked in western areas. The duck migration was apparently poor everywhere, with emphasis on the continued scarcity of Redheads and Canvasbacks. Peak numbers at Montezuma were comparable to those of a year ago. Inland shorebird records of especial note included Purple Sandpipers in Regions 1, 2, 5, and 6, Whimbrels in Regions 2 and 5, a Hudsonian Godwit in Region 2, a Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Region 1, and all three phalaropes in Region 5. An Avocet and a flock of 14 Godwits, representing both species, were outstanding on Long Island.

One of the most interesting ornithological events of the season was the tremendous southward movement of Black-capped Chickadees. Howard Miller's field note in this issue provides complete details on the heavy flight

near Rochester, but it was by no means limited to that area. Strong flights were observed also in Regions 1 and 5, and other regional editors commented upon the abundance of these birds. John Elliott cites a heavy influx of these birds in mid-August in the New York City area.

The story of the Tufted Titmouse continues apace. Its steady increase during the last several years has been well documented in these regional reports. The increase in numbers this fall accelerated to such a degree that more than one regional editor referred to the phenomenon as a veritable explosion. These birds appeared in many areas where hitherto unrecorded (including a first record for Region 6), and reports of Titmice at feeding stations were almost commonplace. Of note also is the fact that migrating Titmice were observed with the hordes of Black-caps along the Lake Ontario shore, and the obvious implication here, of course, is that these birds originated from points even further north.

The fall season provides a certain sense of anticipation that is lacking in the spring. During the spring migration we know the approximate date of arrival of each of the various species. During the fall, however, we do not know the make-up of the population of northern birds arriving for the winter until these flights actually take place. The fall flight of these northerners this year was quite different from those of the last several autumns, and these in turn had been different each from the other. In the forefront of this year's flight were two species that were almost totally absent last year, the Boreal Chickadee and the Pine Grosbeak, and the extensive flight of these birds reached considerably beyond the southern borders of New York State. The Evening Grosbeak flight, now also an annual affair, was heavier than last year but considerably below peak years. Snowy Owls put in an unexpectedly good showing after last year's fine flight, with the earliest reports coming from Regions 2, 6, and 8 in late October. Crossbills (the dominant birds last winter), Redpolls, and Pine Siskins were observed only sparingly, and early indications were that Northern Shrikes would not be as numerous as usual. Snow Buntings were only moderately common. There were no observations of Black-backed Woodpeckers except in the Adirondacks. Rough-legged Hawks arrived in good numbers, and there was a notable peak count of over twenty at Point Peninsula, in Region 6. Bohemian Waxwings created some excitement in western parts of the state, with reports coming from Regions 1, 2, and 5 — so check the Cedar Waxwing flocks closely this winter!

An immature Black-throated Gray Warbler was spotted on Long Island in late September, but the bird did not tarry long, much to the disappointment of many would-be observers who combed the Jones Beach area for it. A Harris' Sparrow in central New York was a bit more obliging (see field notes section). Of interest, too, was a reported sighting of a Brewer's Blackbird in Ulster County.

Bluebird reports overall were encouraging, indicative of a fairly good breeding season. Observations of Carolina Wrens, however, were few indeed, a confirmation of observations earlier in the year that this species had suffered quite drastically in last winter's severe weather. The Christmas counts will give us further information on the status of these two species.

The House Finch continued its expansion in the metropolitan New York area, and this was a new bird for many who attended the annual Federation meeting there in late September.