

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

April 1 – May 31

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Extremely variable weather was the main feature of the spring migration. The cold spell in early May, which included snow falls and frosts, caused severe losses among the early-arriving insectivores. Road-side foraging of many species, including thrushes, warblers and tanagers was reported from several localities. Although several species of flycatchers and swallows were, apparently, hard-hit the losses were best documented for the Purple Martin. Counts of losses are given in the reports of Regions 3, 4, 5, 9 & 10. It is hoped that follow-up studies will be made in many areas. An important new study on population density is being started by Chan Robbins of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It consists of transits driven by car for 25 miles with stops of three minutes every half mile. During this time the numbers of every species seen or heard are recorded. This study is being conducted in many states including New York and anyone interested should contact Chan Robbins at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland. It is hoped that this survey, in conjunction with the nest record card program and the Audubon Field Notes bird census (both of which need more contributors) will play an important role in studies to monitor our polluted environment.

The disaster which overtook the Purple Martin was one of the largest recorded in this area for some time but more spectacular disasters have occurred. In the Alps hundreds of thousands of swallows were trapped by cold weather during their migration; some 89,000 were flown to Venice but this represented only a small fraction of the total number involved. An autumn snowstorm over Lake Huron is credited with the deaths of three quarters of a million Lapland Longspurs.

Two long-time trends that have been mentioned before in these summaries continued this spring. These were increases of Mockingbirds and Blue-Gray Gnatcatchers. Increases or new localities for Mockingbirds were noted in seven Regions and for Gnatcatchers in five. Both species of cuckoo were noted as scarce by several recorders.

Several areas, especially Region 8, reported good counts of shorebirds. Willets were reported in Regions 2 & 8; inland records of this species that have been sub-specifically identified belong to the western race *inoratus*. This race breeds in the great plains and some winter on the Atlantic coast. Although the nominate race breeds as far north as New Jersey and also in Nova Scotia it is rare inland. Record counts of Dowitchers were noted in Regions 5 & 8.

The Connecticut Warbler, always scarce in spring, was reported from three Regions. Other rarities included Franklin's Gull and Clay-colored Sparrow (Region 1), Harris's Sparrow and White-fronted Goose (Region 3), and House Finch (Region 4).

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Abbreviations used in regional reports: arr-arrival, arrived; Co-County; imm-immature; L-Lake; max-maximum one day count; mob-many observers; Pk-Park; Pt-Point; R-River; Rd-Road.

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

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April temperature was near normal with from one to six degrees cooler the first two weeks and, except for two cold days April 26 and 27, during the latter half of the month attaining a nearly normal degree per day standard. Each day from May 1-13, except May 5, the daily temperature ranged from five to thirteen degrees below normal. On May 10 and 11 the thermometer dropped to a cold 31 degrees. A warming trend during the balance of the month offset the early cold, so that the average May temperature was only slightly below normal. Precipitation, following the trend of the preceding months, remained below normal and thus April and May were cooler and drier than the mean for this period.

A warm spell April 19-21 brought the heaviest migratory movement of the month. The largest hawk flight occurred on April 21 with a count of 1383 from the south shore of Lake Erie, 27 from Lancaster area and 486 from Lyndonville near Lake Ontario. Included in this flight were larger numbers of Ospreys and Turkey Vultures than have been recorded in most recent spring migrations.

The prolonged cold of early May took a large toll of the Purple Martins. Dr. Axtell at the Buffalo Museum of Science had more than 20 calls about dead birds from people who had martin houses. In at least each of two cases 30 or more birds were found dead on the ground or in the houses. Lack of insects caused starvation which took the lives of hundreds of these birds in the area.

There were no spectacular movements of land birds in May and only during a few days in the third week did observers have good luck in the field.

Unusual species included Red-throated Loon, Glossy Ibis, Common Eider, Chukar.

Abbreviations: Alleg-Allegany; Al-Pi-Alma to Pikeville; Alleg SPk-Allegany State Park; Alleg Rd, Ha-Allegany Road, Hanover; Bflo-Buffalo; Catt-Cattaraugus; Cem-Cemetery; Chau-Chautauqua; CRPk-Chestnut Ridge Park; CPkL-Como Park, Lancaster; Du-Ha-Dunkirk to Hanover; Fourmile-Four-mile Creek State Park; Ft Nia-Fort Niagara; FL-Forest Lawn Cemetery, Bflo; H-harbor; HTPk-Hamburg Town Park; Hb-Ha-Hamburg to Hanover; Is-Island; MBC-May Bird Count, conducted for many years by Bflo Ornith. Soc., covering about 25 territories thru entire Region, about 190 observers this year; Ont-Ontario; OO-Oak Orchard area; OOGMA-Oak Orchard Game Management Area; SSLE-south shore Lake Erie; TGMA-Tonawanda Game Management Area; thru-throughout; TRdC-Tillman Rd, Clarence Hb-Ang-Hamburg to Angola.

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