

THE STATUS OF BONAPARTE'S GULL IN NEW YORK STATE

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Bonaparte's Gull (*Larus philadelphia*) breeds from western and central Alaska east to west-central Ontario and south to central British Columbia, southeastern Alberta and central western Saskatchewan, nesting in spruce trees near lakes and ponds in the muskeg [1 & 2]. Its winter range is from west-central Washington to southern Baja California on the West Coast; and from Lake Erie and northern Massachusetts (mild winters) south to central Florida and the Gulf of Mexico in the eastern United States [2].

In New York State, DeKay (1844) considered it "one of the most common species on our coast" in the winter [3]. Eaton (1914) described the Bonaparte's Gull as follows: "Next to the Herring Gull this is the best known and most generally distributed gull in the State, especially in the interior . . . a transient visitant in considerable numbers in our inland lakes as well as the seacoast, and a few are occasionally seen in winter on Long Island and the Great Lakes. . . . On Long Island it arrives from the North in October or early November and returns to the North in April" [4]. Northward migration inland through the Lake Ontario region occurs primarily from the second of April to the tenth of June; southward movement from the first of October until the twentieth of November [4].

It is the purpose of the authors to describe the present status of the Bonaparte's Gull in New York State. A description of its distribution in the state will be followed by a summary of its status in each of the ten *Kingbird* reporting Regions. Extreme migration dates, summer and winter occurrences and maximum numbers will be considered. It is hoped that this presentation of the available data will encourage field observers to gather the data needed to further the knowledge of its occurrence in the state.

NEW YORK STATE

Bonaparte's Gull has been recorded from every reporting Region in the state. Largest numbers occur in the Great Lakes area and the New York City-Long Island region. In the Great Lakes regions, spring migration normally occurs from late March to mid-May, or into June, and fall migration occurs from early August to late December. As many as 100,000 individuals have been observed in one day in late November on the Niagara River [5] although admittedly this number is unprecedented. Maximum fall numbers of 10,000 are not uncommon in this area. Migrating gulls begin to arrive in the New York City area in early September and remain until their departure in late April for northern Canada. As many as 10,000 have been reported from one point in the New York City area. In the interior of the State, peaks of 500 at Montezuma and 300 at Verona Beach are exceedingly high. Groups of 15 to 20 have been recorded from

lake locations throughout the rest of the state. The gulls are rarest in the northern regions of New York State.

Data from the Christmas counts (*Bird Lore*, *Audubon Magazine* and *Audubon Field Notes*) may be valuable in ascertaining occurrence of Bonaparte's Gull at this time throughout the state. Table 1 indicates the areas of high concentration, average number and maximum numbers for each count area. Table 2 might be interpreted as indicating an increase in the total number of birds observed in the state. This may be true for the periods after 1945. Numbers reported for years before 1945 cannot easily be compared to data subsequent to that date, as of the three areas of highest concentration — Buffalo, Brooklyn and Manhattan — only Buffalo has been regularly covered during the entire period covered in Table 2. Brooklyn was not covered for 10 of the years from 1925 through 1944, and for one of the missing years, 1931, the Staten Island report noted that Bonaparte's Gull "has been abundant along Brooklyn water-front but not in the ferry route" so that no count was recorded. Manhattan was not covered regularly until 1946.

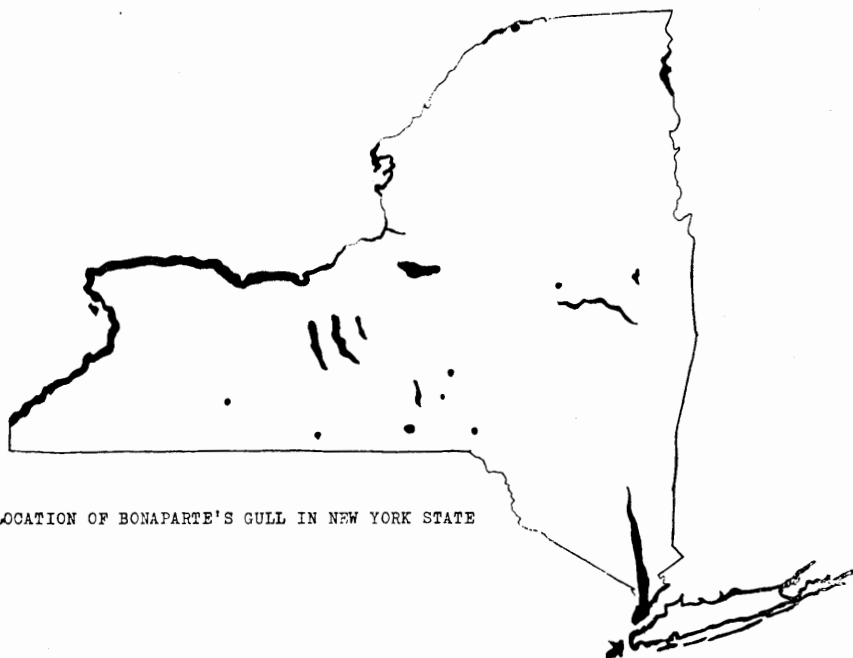
TABLE I
OCCURRENCE OF BONAPARTE'S GULL

Audubon Christmas Counts
1945-6 to 1965-6

	Count Area	high-year	low-year	# of counts with Gulls present	# of counts taken	Average # of Gulls per count*
N. Y. C. - Long Island	Bronx - Westchester	1235 - 1964	1 - 1956	15	20	102
	Brooklyn.....	4720 - 1950	121 - 1958	20	20	1082
	Captree.....	295 - 1964	5 - 1963	3	3	—
	Central Suffolk....	186 - 1965	1 - 1956	8	13	39
	Manhattan.....	6000 - 1965	1 - 1947	18	19	1070
	Montauk.....	1760 - 1958	30 - 1953	17	17	362
	Northern Nassau..	342 - 1965	1 - 1959			
	Ocean off L.I.	55 - 1962	7 - 1958	6	13	38
	Orient.....	172 - 1965	3 - 1963	2	3	—
			1962	6	13	17
	Port Chester	2 - 1949	1 - 1953	2	10	0
	Queens.....	24 - 1964	6 - 1965	2	2	—
	Smithtown.....	1245 - 1965	6 - 1963	7	19	90
	Southern Nassau ..	1268 - 1965	1 - 1948	17	20	200
Western N. Y.	Staten Island.....	5406 - 1956	4 - 1948	20	20	746
	Watermill to Quogue	43 - 1960	1 - 1949	11	17	9
	Western Long Island	160 - 1954	1 - 1946			
			1949	9	10	23
	Buffalo.....	8601 - 1955	10 - 1951	19	20	2000
	Geneva.....	1 - 1953	—	1	20	0
	Hamburg.....	300 - 1957	2 - 1965	2	20	17
	Rochester.....	666 - 1965	2 - 1950	18	20	124

* Averages not calculated for less than five counts. Additional counts conducted only once, with year and number of Bonaparte's Gulls reported were:

Amagansette to Watermill 1949, 1; Oak Beach 1946, 8; Ocean off Brooklyn 1948, 400; Fredonia 1965, 103.



LOCATION OF BONAPARTE'S GULL IN NEW YORK STATE

TABLE 2. TOTAL BONAPARTE'S GULLS IN NEW YORK STATE

Ten Year Period	Average # for Period	Average # of counts for Period*
1955-64	5840	16.4
1945-54	4309	12.5
1935-44	3923	10.1
1925-34	821	9.3

* Includes only counts on which Bonaparte's Gull has ever been reported.

REGIONAL STATUS

The authors have used information from field observers and regional editors as well as the literature. The terms used in the discussion of the Regions are:

Frequency of Occurrence:

Regular —	Recorded every year.
Irregular —	Recorded less than every year, but more often than once in four years.
Occasional —	Recorded more than once in nine years but less than once in four years.
Sporadic —	Recorded less than once in nine years.

Relative Abundance: Given in terms of the number a competent observer might see in any one day at the proper time of the year.

Abundant —	Over 500
Very Common —	Between 100 and 500
Common —	Between 25 and 100
Fairly Common —	25 or less
Uncommon —	10 or less
Rare —	Between 1 and 5

For most of the Regions, frequencies refer to the records as reported in the *Kingbird*. Local records and publications were used where available. Extreme migration dates are given in parenthesis following the status of the species in the spring and fall. Unless otherwise noted, records can be found in the *Kingbird* for that reporting period.

Region 1: Niagara Frontier

Regular very common to abundant spring migrant (March 16, 1946 [6] to June 7, 1945 [6])

Regular abundant fall migrant (July 11, 1965 [5] to February 25, 1950 [7])

Irregular summer and winter visitant

Usual spring migration begins the last week in March and tapers off in mid-May with late stragglers lingering into June. Peak numbers of 3000 to 5000 [8] are most often found on the north and south shores of Lake Erie and on the Niagara River in April. Migrating gulls have been observed moving east along the lake near Dunkirk, New York. Although spring birds are found all along the lake shore, Dunkirk Harbor attracts the largest congregations. On 23 April 1967, Burger observed 5000 birds within the confines of the harbor.

Beardslee and Mitchell (1965) [6] classify the Bonaparte's Gull as an uncommon summer visitant. Summering birds were recorded in six of the last 15 years. They were almost exclusively second year birds.

An early movement of adults and juveniles passes through the area in mid to late August followed by a larger wave of migrants comprised chiefly of adults in late November to early December. The Niagara River seems to act as a funnel for transient gulls and concentrations of from 5000 to 10,000 Bonaparte's are not uncommon.

Bonaparte's Gull, although it may linger well into January and February, seldom remains the entire winter. Experience has shown that for a bird to have "wintered," it must have been recorded after the third week

of February. Wintering birds are most often found in the Niagara Falls area and in Dunkirk Harbor.

Maxima:	100,000	Niagara River and adjacent reservoirs – 25 Nov. 1959 [5]
	15,000	Niagara River – 5 Dec. 1937 [6]
	12,000	Niagara River – Nov. 1958 [6]
	11,000	April Bird Count – 8 April 1960 [6]
	10,000	Niagara River – 3 May 1930 [9]
	8,743	Niagara River – 20 Dec. 1959 [6]
	8,600	Christmas Count – 26 Dec. 1955 [6]
	6,991	April Bird Count – 12 April 1959 [6]

Note: The 100,000 Bonaparte's Gulls observed 25 Nov. 1959 represents an area by area count made by Richard Brownstein and Arthur Schaffner of the entire Niagara River and adjoining reservoirs. The estimate of 30,000 on Nov. 26, 1959 quoted in the *Prothonotary* [25(12):76] and the *Kingbird* [9(4):159] represents "a conservative estimate" and not an area by area count. E. L. Seeber (pers. comm.) stated he estimated 75,000 to 80,000 on the river alone in the latter part of the month.

Region 2: Genesee

Regular common to abundant spring migrant (March 22, 1957 to June 20, 1967 [10])

Regular abundant fall migrant (Sept 1, 1966 [10] to Jan 2, 1966 [10])

Regular uncommon summer visitant

Occasional uncommon winter visitant

Bonaparte's Gulls occur in fewer numbers and are more scattered in the spring than the fall. Tanghe (1955) [11] reports a peak in mid April and another peak in mid May. Peak spring numbers of between 100 and 200 usually occur in May. Occasionally, exceptionally high numbers are recorded in late April or early May. Often the migrating gulls are observed moving west along Lake Ontario.

A few gulls are reported almost every year at some time during the summer. A hundred were observed on 19 July 1959 at Manitou Beach.

A few Bonaparte's Gulls appear in late August and September but the peak of the fall migration is mid September to mid October. They thin out in December and usually disappear at the end of December. As many as 3000 have appeared in one day in September at Braddock's Bay following north-west winds [12].

Winter records are: Three birds at Irondequoit Bay outlet 22 Jan. 1967, eight at Irondequoit Bay 26 Jan. 1964, seven at Irondequoit Bay 13 Feb. 1960, and one on 26 Feb. 1956 in the Region, exact location not stated.

Although they are observed all along the shores of Lake Ontario, the areas of high concentration are Braddock's Bay, Irondequoit Bay, Salmon Creek and Sea Breeze.

Maxima: 3000 Braddock's Bay to Hamlin — 3 May 1956 [13]
3000 Lakeshore — 24 April 1948 [13]
1000 East Lakeshore — 12 Nov. 1966
1000 Sea Breeze — 10 Dec. 1960
750 Salmon Creek — 25 April 1959
500 East Lakeshore — 24 Nov. 1962

Region 3: Finger Lakes

Regular common to very common spring migrant (March 31, 1960 to May 17, 1959)

Irregular fairly common fall migrant (Sept 27, 1961 to Jan 4, 1955)

Sporadic rare summer visitant

Spring migration usually occurs from early April to late April with scattered reports of less than 30 birds and larger numbers on Cayuga Lake. The species has been recorded three times in the summer: four at Montezuma on 28 July 1965; two at Seneca Lake on 14 July 1964, and one at Montezuma on 16 Aug 1964 (it is not likely that this is an early fall migrant in view of the comparatively late fall arrival dates). It is less common in the fall than the spring, with no large flocks recorded.

Bonaparte's Gull appears most frequently at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge and Cayuga Lake with some reports from Almond Damsite, Hornell Basin, Elmira, Keuka Lake, Sapsucker Woods and Seneca Lake.

Maxima: 500 Montezuma N.W.R. — Spring 1956
450 Cayuga Lake — 3 May 1967 ([14]
200 Cayuga Lake — 14 May 1965
200 Seneca Lake — 23 April 1967
120 Cayuga Lake — 10 April 1967 [14]
54 Hornell Basin — 18 April 1957

Region 4: Susquehanna

Regular fairly common to common spring migrant (March 10, 1961 to June 4, 1956)

Sporadic fall migrant

Usually spring migration is from early April to mid May with 15 or less being reported on any day. The 4 June 1957 date is the only one after May 17. The March 10th bird at Binghamton is the only March record for this area.

The species has been recorded most frequently at Whitney Point and Endwell, with other records from Binghamton, Boland Marsh, Deposit, Greene, Ingraham Hill, Norwich, Oneonta Reservoir, Owego and Unadilla.

A single bird observed 20 Sept 1963 at Whitney Point is the only fall record.

Maxima: 50 Owego — 23 April 1964
50 Whitney Point — 20 April 1963
16 Owego — 22 April 1961
15 Norwich — 23 April 1961
15 Whitney Point — 6 April 1957

Region 5: Oneida Lake Basin

Irregular fairly common spring migrant (March 17, 1963 to June 3, 1956)

Regular common to very common fall migrant (July 27, 1923 [15] to Dec. 16, 1956)

Irregular summer visitant

Sporadic rare winter visitant

Usual spring migration records of 15 or fewer birds are noted from early April to late May. Ten were recorded 30 June 1956 at Sandy Pond. Scattered fall birds arrive in August with the majority arriving from September until early November. The species seems to be increasing in the fall, with higher numbers observed in recent years. It is interesting to note that Dayton Stoner (1932) thought the species was less common in the interior of the state than it had been 20 years before although this observation only covered the period May 1–Aug. 15 [15]. He quotes that Sadler saw ten birds at Brewerton 16 May 1924 [15].

The two winter records were in 1958: one bird seen 1 Jan at Oneida Lake and two at Oswego in early February.

Maxima. 300 Verona Beach — 1 Sept 1963
166 Oneida Lake — 18 Nov 1965
150 Oneida Lake — 28 Nov 1964
100 Sylvan and Verona Beaches — 12 Sept 1965
85 Verona Beach — 11 Nov 1962

Region 6: St. Lawrence

Occasional rare spring migrant

Irregular uncommon fall migrant (July 22, 1962 to Nov 20, 1965 [16])

The species has been recorded in the *Kingbird* twice in spring migration: one at Perch River Game Management Area 30 April 1966 and three at Massena on 4 May 1965.

In the fall the species usually occurs as single birds or in groups of fewer than six. All records are for less than six except those listed as maxima. It appears that the species is increasing, the same kind of birding yielding more individuals now than in the past [16]. Bonaparte's Gulls used to be observed in the fall in late Oct. and Nov. only, but recently they can be expected to appear over a longer period of time. El Dorado seems to be the best location for this gull, with other reports from Adams Cove, Henderson Harbor, Massena, Perch Beach, Point Salubrious, Point Peninsula, Southwicks Beach, and Stony Point.

Maxima: 80 El Dorado — 13 Aug 1961

25 Henderson Harbor — fall 1966 (no date given)

24 El Dorado — 14 Aug 1965

20 El Dorado — 22 July 1962

Region 7: Adirondack — Champlain

Sporadic rare spring migrant

Occasional rare fall migrant

The fewest records of Bonaparte's Gull in New York State occur in this Region. The species was recorded in the "summer" (no date or number given) of 1960 from the Port Kent and Keeseville areas. The only other records are:

15 Au Sable Point — 17 Oct 1955

13 Au Sable Point — 2 Nov 1954

Region 8: Hudson — Mohawk

Irregular fairly common spring migrant (April 2, 1962 to May 24, 1958)

Irregular fairly common fall migrant (Aug 26, 1933 [17] to Dec 8, 1962)

Sporadic rare summer visitant

Bonaparte's Gull is erratic in the spring and is usually observed on the Mohawk River. An unusually good flight was recorded in the spring of 1966 with birds being observed from 17 April to 18 May (max: 16 on 17 May). Westward movement on the river has been observed in the spring.

Two summer records exist: one bird on 25 July 1932 [17] and one on Galway Lake 1 Aug 1966.

Field observers in the area expect to see the species in the fall when it is more apt to be found on the lakes (Round Lake, Ballston Lake and Saratoga Lake) than on the Mohawk River.

Published records of this species have increased in recent years. Local records (*Feathers*) [18] indicate that in the period from 1947 to 1961 the species was totally lacking in three years and recorded only once in each of six years. In the period since 1961 it has been recorded three or more times each year.

Maxima: 80 Ballston Lake — 6 May 1956
25 Saratoga Lake — 15 May 1965
22 Saratoga Lake — 8 Dec 1962
16 Lock Seven, Mohawk River — 17 May 1966
15 Saratoga Lake — 27 April 1963

Region 9: Hudson — Delaware

Irregular common spring migrant (April 5, 1948 [19] and 1967 to May 1, 1959)

Occasional rare fall migrant (Aug 13, 1966 to Oct 31, 1935 [19])

The species is unusual in the area, with no more than 3 records for any one year. Usual spring migration is from early April to mid April. One summer bird was reported 21 July 1957 at Ashokan Reservoir. Usual fall migration occurs from late August to early September, the species being more erratic in the fall than the spring. The best area seems to be Cornwall, with other records from Ashokan Reservoir, Beacon [20], Lackawich Reservoir, New Hamburg, Lake DeForest, Piermont Pier, and Poughkeepsie [20]. All records are for less than three birds except the maxima.

Deed [19] states that the Bonaparte's Gull is "found much more often in fall than spring" although his data do not support this statement. A spring peak of 89 is given by Deed [19].

Maxima: 89 Cornwall — 7 April 1957
23 Piermont Pier — 29 April 1956

Region 10: Marine

Regular abundant spring and fall migrant

Abundant winter resident

Occasional summer visitant

Migrants usually begin to arrive in the area in early September, but remain in low numbers throughout September and October. The number increases in November and peaks the end of December. The population levels off in January, remaining the same throughout January and February until the birds begin to move out in late March, becoming scarce by May.

A large population winters at Jones Inlet and another winters off Montauk Point. A flock seems to winter in the New York City Harbor area, wandering as far up the Hudson as Yonkers.

Bonaparte's Gulls are occasional in the summer. Bull (1964) cites the following records: 20 birds at Raritan Bay 27 June 1954, 30 at Raritan Bay 28 July 1923, 5 at Long Beach in June and July 1937 and "Collected, Great Gull Island, July 8, 1889 (Chapman and Dutcher)" [21]. A single bird was observed from 26 July 1965 into the fall on Jamaica Bay.

Maxima: 10,000 Gravesend — late Dec 1962 and early Jan 1963 [21]

4,500 Montauk Point — 5 Jan 1936 [21]

3,500 Montauk Point — 22 Dec 1946 [21]

2,500 Narrows — 12 April 1947 [21]

2,500 Lower Bay — 2 Nov 1941 [21]

2,000 Jones Beach — late Jan 1962

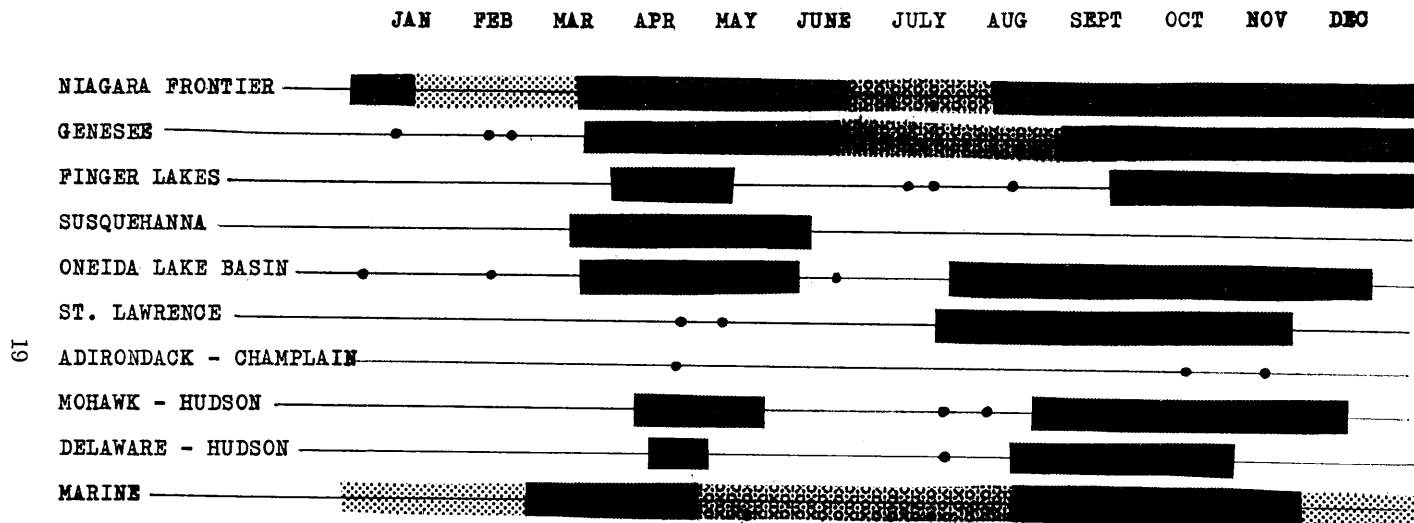
SUMMARY

The Bonaparte's Gull is an abundant spring and fall migrant on the Great Lakes and in the New York City — Long Island Area. It is rarer inland, occurring on rivers and the larger lakes. The species has been recorded only in spring migration in the Susquehanna Region, only in the fall migration in the St. Lawrence Region, and is very rare in the Adirondack-Champlain Region.

Summering birds might be expected on the Great Lakes as well as in New York Harbor. Although Bonaparte's Gull winters in large numbers in the Marine Region of the state, it can also be expected to winter in small numbers in mild winters in the Niagara Frontier area.

Published records have been more frequent and numbers reported have been higher in recent years indicating that the total population may be increasing.

SUMMARY OF THE STATUS OF BONAPARTE'S GULL IN N.Y.S. BY REGIONS



KEY

- SUMMER VISITANTS
- MIGRANTS
- WINTER VISITANTS
- ISOLATED BIRDS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The status of the Bonaparte's Gull in New York State is information compiled relative to a field study on the migratory behavior and local movements of the species supported by funds from the Mae P. Smith Gull Fund of The American Museum of Natural History, New York City and the Research Foundation of the State University of New York.

The authors are indebted to the regional editors and other field observers who willingly gave their data and observations.

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