

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

Fritz Scheider

Everyone pretty much agreed — it was a very mild, very warm fall, dry in the central and western half of the state, wet, if only episodically so, in the eastern sectors. The lack of frosts — some record breaking late — and snow permitted an array of departure dates that in any other autumn would have been astounding. The multiplicity of late vireos (3,5,8,9,10) and warblers (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10) stood out along with scattered record late dates for certain swallows (2,6,7) and Ruby-throated Hummingbird (3,4,8,9). Surprisingly few late shorebirds were recorded and the overall shorebird migration sounded like a dull thud. And as to be expected with such warm, mild falls, the cold weather grebes, diving ducks (1,2,3,5,7,8) and gulls were all very scarce or reported in worrisome low numbers.

Most encouraging in the potpourri of fall reports are the multiple and varied intra-regional — many co-operative — projects that have been initiated; the most obvious are the various hawk migration tallies established in Region 9, but the drive for repeated off-shore trips to document the status of pelagic species off Long Island (10), co-operative, sequential dead bird tallies along Lake Ontario in Region 5 (vide infra), and tallies of tower kills (Regions 3,5) all point to great enthusiasm for assessing avifauna, understanding migration patterns, and filling the lacunae of local birding knowledge. Equally interesting is the array of data presented and interpreted. Where many areas of upstate New York have no published standard sources of data to compare current records with, such sectors as Region 1 with their incredibly useful Beardslee's and Mitchell's *Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region* and Region 10 with John Bull's *Birds of the New York Area* are already editorializing on these mountains of information; and, I suspect, full awareness of the import of certain published data from such well-summarized sectors demands one be conversant with these texts, i.e., you need those books. As a second but equally firm aside, I emphasize the abundance of the much needed caveats for carefulness which John Bull has placed in various "tough-to-identify" species accounts in his recent text.

Double-crested Cormorants were widely reported (1,2,3,5,7,9) with record numbers in certain sectors. However, white herons continued scarce and Black-crowned Night Herons were also scarce upstate (1,5); fall reports of Glossy Ibis (2,5) were the only positive note in the long-legged waders.

The Brant flight on Lake Ontario proved particularly good, with several days when thousands were reported (2,5) with some inland records also (3,8,9). Black Ducks continue to decline and upstate only Mon-

tezuma National Wildlife Refuge (3) showed good dabbling duck numbers (q.v.).

The Accipitridophiles should carefully peruse the Region 9 tallies of the flights at Mount Peter and Hook Mountain and then check thru Snow Goose for an avian spin-off of such studies. Hawks across the rest of state seemed distressingly low with little evidence of a good Rough-legged Hawk winter ahead.

Coot, unlike their prairie confreres, Canvasback and Redhead, seemed to have enjoyed a lush breeding season as they were reported up in 1,2,5,9. The shorebird flight in general was poor in number and dull in variety, late in coming and early in going — only a spurt of Buff-breasted Sandpipers in central and western New York (1,5) and a few late Red Phalaropes (1,2,5) enlivened the picture. The Lake Erie-Ontario Forster's Tern flight (1,2,5), one of the best ever, was matched eastward by a post-hurricane influx of the same species in Region 9.

Snowy Owls were reported widely, often, and early (1,2,3,5,6,8,9,10) and everyone echoed the prediction of a Snowy Owl winter; few Short-eared Owls, however, accompanied the irruption.

Common Nighthawk numbers are noted to be down in 1,2,3,8,9 with some increase in 5, and though Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were reported late, no large numbers were reported except in Region 8. Carolina Wrens reports increased (1,3,4,5,9) and in certain sectors Tufted Titmouse were up (1,4,5,8), in others, Mockingbirds increased (4,8,9). Though no major northern exodus of nuthatches or chickadees developed, a few Boreal Chickadees were tallied (5,9,10) and more may show up when northern food supplies dwindle as Region 7 reported them in good numbers on their home territory. Eastern Bluebird numbers increased in 1,2,3, and 4 but no mention of this occurred in any of the more eastern districts. Cedar Waxwings staged a state wide invasion (1,2,3,4,5,8,9) and a few Bohemian Waxwings were noted also.

After Snowy Owls, the subject of discussion thru October and November was winter finches. Pine Siskins (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10) and Evening Grosbeaks (1,2,3,4,5,7,8,9) seemed to be most conspicuous and abundant but lesser numbers of Pine Grosbeak (2,3,4,5,7,8,10) Redpoll, (2,5,7,9,10) and White-winged Crossbill (1,2,3,5,6,7,10) appeared also. Surprisingly Red Crossbill, though recorded, were not common and field finches such as Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting (2,3,5,8) were in low numbers. House Finches continue their crimson spread (1,4,5,8,9) and I hope that documentation of their occurrence is regularly published and summarized to keep birders abreast of the eastern spread of this native adventive. As to the newest adventive, the Monk Parakeet, read the comments of the Region 10 editors!

Rare and unusual birds, in which autumn is usually rich, appeared in copious quantity, particularly in the latter half of the fall. Two outstanding finds were a dead Fulmar (5), the first state specimen, and a

dead Long-tailed Jaeger (5), both found in the littoral litter along Lake Ontario by repeated dead bird surveys of the shoreline. As much as I dislike messing with vintage-type dead birds, it behooves all of us birders to check the beach and shore debris for such avian desiderata — who knows when or where the next Fulmar in the flotsam or a Jaeger in the jetsam will be found. Other rarities for the season include: Arctic Loon (10), Yellow-crowned Night Heron (2), White-fronted Goose (2,3), American Avocet (6,10), Little Gull (6), Black-legged Kittiwake (9), Roseate and Sandwich Terns (9), Sooty Tern (10), Western Kingbird (1,9,10 inland), Common Raven (6,9,10), White-eyed Vireo (3,4), Audubon's Warbler (10), Kentucky Warbler (8), Dickcissel (1,5,9), and Green-tailed Towhee (10).

Congratulations again to observers and editors both — ten out of ten! Build a better series, get a better ball game! Please get your field observations to the editors on time; editors, please, mail in your summaries promptly — and don't catch flu!

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REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

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Weather conditions during August were average with temperature within one degree of normal and precipitation about one inch above normal mainly because of heavy wind and rain on August 21 and 26. Both September and October were unusually warm and dry with average temperatures several degrees above the norm and precipitation well below the long-term average. November continued the trend except for two late fall blizzards which blasted the region with up to twenty inches of snow between November 6 and 8 and an even more severe storm November 22 to 24 which dumped up to thirty inches of snow and brought temperature readings of zero.

Items of interest or trends are: (1) a poor showing of most loons, grebes and herons, (2) a modest display of ducks, geese and swans with poor numbers of most of the divers due to the unseasonably mild weather, (3) a greatly extended and widely dispersed hawk flight, (4) a superb exhibition of rare and uncommon shorebirds, (5) a good representation of larids but subpar for this region, (6) preliminary indications of a fine Snowy Owl winter upcoming, (7) early departure of nearly all of the flycatchers, (8) increase and spreading of the titmouse and Carolina Wren, (9) tragically large numbers of kinglets and a substantial scattering of other birds killed at several TV towers in the Buffalo area, (10) a fine showing of warblers, especially uncommon species (i.e. Connecticut Warbler), with late August and mid September peaks and many late departure dates, (11) a poorly documented but obvious and substantial decrease in the numbers of icterids and Starlings, (12) a poor display of nearly all of the fringillids, especially in terms of numbers, except for modest midfall movements of Evening Grosbeaks and Pine Siskins.

Rarities noted were the European Widgeon, Long-billed Dowitcher, Buff-breasted Sandpiper (*see comments in report*), Hudsonian Godwit, Wilson's Phalarope, Western Kingbird, Dickcissel and House Finch.