

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

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A warm dry, fall generated few flights, much increased shorebird habitat which was but lightly used, and an array of tardy migrants thru October. Snowstorms in certain sectors triggered the exodus of many late-staying birds (dabbling ducks, icterids, sparrows and November landbirding seemed uniformly thin (vide infra).

Numbers of loons and grebes seemed reduced in 2,3,4,5,6,9 but coastal counts were not available for comparison. They like the Canada Geese may have flown right over (marked decrease of Canada Goose numbers in 2,3,5 with definitely better numbers, but still as fly-overs, in 6,7,8,9). Brant staged only a modest flight upstate (2,5) and were unreported otherwise. Ducks have reached disastrously low numbers (2,3,5,7,8,9) with slightly better numbers reported in Region 6 — it seems to involve virtually all groups — dabblers, Aythya, scoters, mergansers' even the northern breeders such as Common Golden-eye, Bufflehead and Oldsquaw; the paucity of Wood Duck (3,5,7,8) is particularly striking.

Increased numbers of Goshawk (? an echo to the massive incursion of '72-'73) were noted but the scarcity of Cooper's and Sharp-shinned Hawks continues. Only Red-tailed Hawks seem to be holding up in numbers and the passage of other Buteos was minimally noted with one brilliant exception — the impressive hawk migration tallies in Region 9 (q.v.). Rough-legged Hawk were very scarce (2,3,4,7,9) and Snowy Owl even scarcer (2,3,5,8) indicating no major incursions of tundra raptors for this winter. Ring-necked Pheasant have declined tremendously because of 1) cessation of stocking programs by the state, 2) hunting, and 3) changes in local farming and land-use practices.

Shorebird variety seemed uniformly good but the numbers appeared much reduced particularly amongst the scarcer "peep" sandpipers, i.e. White-rumped, Baird's and Western Sandpipers. Large areas of available habitat in October and early November sported nothing but a few Dunlin and an occasional Killdeer. A jaeger flight on Lake Ontario (2,5) was sauce to an impressive array and variety of gulls there and on the St. Lawrence River but no "inland" occurrences of same were detected. The presence of November Glaucous and Iceland Gulls presages a good "white-winged" gull winter.

Large groups of migrating Common Nighthawk were reported (2,3,6,9); this is particularly strange in view of their decline as breeders in many areas of the state. Red-bellied Woodpecker are definitely spreading (3,5,9) with the upstate birds undoubtedly advancing from

the Genesee River and Seneca River lowlands and the Region 9 birds working north thru New Jersey.

Swallow numbers were decreased (2,3,4,5,6,8) and very early departures were the rule, this despite the better feeding conditions of the warm, dry fall. The paucity of winter landbirds, particularly chickadees, nuthatches, creepers, and to a lesser extent, Tree Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos, was mentioned by many observers and Red-breasted Nuthatches were particularly conspicuous by their absence, even in the Adirondack (5,6,7,8,) sectors. Tufted Titmouse continue to expand (2,3, even into 7) but the really rising Southerner is the Carolina Wren with increasing reports from most sectors (2,3,4,5,7,8,9). Hermit Thrush numbers seemed high this fall (4,5,7) but most other thrushes were noted mainly as fly-overs and the Eastern Bluebird continued very scarce (3,5,9 with slightly better tallies in 4 and 7). Northern Shrike invaded (2,3,4,5,6,7,8) with numerous late October and early November records.

The warbler migration was fair to heavy (3,5,8,9), especially so in Tennessee, Cape May, Magnolia, and Bay-breasted Warblers but with reduced numbers of Yellow-rumped Warbler and American Redstart; numerous late warblers (2,4,5,8,9) attest to the mild fall but appropriate parallels (tardy shorebirds, flycatchers, swallows, vireos) to this were not evident. Above average flights of Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Gdosbeak (4,5) were noted along with continued Cardinal (5,6) and House Finch (2,3,5,8) expansion, the latter less explosively than one would have thought considering the acres of suburbia it has to exploit. A fair flight of winter finches – Evening Grosbeak (2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9), Pine Siskin (2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9), Red Crossbill (2,3,4,5,6,7,8) with lesser numbers of Common Redpoll (2,5) – may brighten the birding doldrums of January, February, and March and enliven the finch sections of various Christmas Bird Counts.

Only one report (9) mentioned Monk Parakeet – perhaps the New York State extirpation program is working. If we could only eliminate snowmobiles as readily!

Seasonal rarities include White-fronted Goose (3), Whimbrel (5,6), Purple Sandpiper (2,5,6), Buff-breasted Sandpiper (9), Pomarine Jaeger (2,5), Black-legged Kittiwake (5,6), Acadian Flycatcher (4), Bohemian Waxwing (3), Prothonotary Warbler (2) and Summer Tanager (2).

No reports from 1 and 10 make the state-wide summary incomplete and difficult especially regarding waterfowl, gulls and western strays. Let's hear it from 1 and 10!

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