

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

ROBERT W. SMART

When, in a moment of utter weakness, I agreed to write the Highlights of the seasonal reports, I had not realized two very important things. First of all, the complete impossibility of reducing the wealth of information in the various reports to a few comprehensive patterns became obvious. Secondly, I stand in awe of the superb job that Fritz Scheider has done. I will try to maintain his standards although I am sure that my approach will be quite different.

The individual regional reports must speak for themselves. I urge in the strongest possible terms that they be read very carefully. The great danger of summaries is that they are the only part of the records that are read. This would be very unfortunate. The regional editors have done a tremendous job in assembling the information and they deserve to have this material studied carefully. They have all complained about having to cut down their reports because of space limitations and have, therefore, included only the most important items. Many thanks to you all, with the possible exception of one very late reporter. The editors can not get their reports in on time if the field reports are late. Please report as promptly and as fully as possible.

The weather for the period was reported as "nearly average," "nothing spectacular" and "uneventful." Many of the upstate regions commented on early frosts and snow. Region 5 complained about the amount of warm, wet weather with East and Southerly winds resulting in "virtually no birds." The importance of very local conditions is pointed up in the same report when a flight of sparrows was produced by fog conditions. The flight vanished with the fog. It is important to remember that "poor flight conditions" merely mean that the conditions are poor for the *observation* of the flight. The great concentrations of migrants that can make the season so exciting usually depend on adverse conditions causing an interruption of the migration flow. A very cogent comment comes from region 8 about the effect that rainy *weekends* has on the observations. The importance of the "weekend effect" should not be overlooked.

Opinions on the migration varied from good to wretched. Region 3 talks about good shorebirding but region 5 calls the shorebird flight "dismal." Regions 3 and 5 both comment on the poor duck flight while region 6 says that "waterfowl were again in enjoyable numbers." Again notice the contradictory reports on the finch flight.

Regions 3 and 5 mention poor finch flight. Region 6 speaks of an excellent array of finches. Region 7 has Purple Finches in good numbers and region 8 says that no Purple Finches were banded and thinks that "something drastic must have occurred." Region 9 had a large Evening Grosbeak flight and region 10 a "dearth of finches." Again the importance of a careful reading of EACH report is evident.

Some species and species groups are of particular interest. Hudsonian Godwits made a fine showing. The total of 26 on the coast is not exceptional but notice the flock of 37 in region 1. Single birds were also reported in regions 2, 5 and 6. Phalaropes were very well reported inland with all three species reported from regions 1, 2 and 5; Northern and Red from region 6 and Northern from region 3. All three are to be expected on the coast. Note that the Wilson's is only a bird of the flats and the Red was seen only at sea. The Jaeger reports are very interesting. Parasitics were reported from regions 1, 2 and 5 as well as from the coast. The Pomarine in region 2 is good although it is certainly regular on the Great Lakes. The Jaeger counts from the coast are instructive. It is becoming more and more obvious that the Pomarine Jaeger is much commoner at sea and that the Parasitic is the one to be expected along the outer shore. (Where, oh where, are the Long-tails?) Another normally pelagic species was reported inland from four regions—Kittiwake in regions 1, 5, 6 and 9.

It looked like a banner year for Snowy Owls with approximately 37 individuals reported from the state by the end of the period. The flight did not continue, however, and most of the birds soon vanished.

Among the seasonal rarities reported were: Region 1—Eared Grebe, Purple Sandpiper, Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, Prothonotary Warbler; Region 2—Eared Grebe, Purple Sandpiper, Pomarine Jaeger, Bewick's Wren; Region 3—European Wigeon, Brewster's and Connecticut Warblers; Region 5—Gyr Falcon, Whimbrel, Franklin's Gull; Region 6—Spruce Grouse, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Hooded Warbler; Region 7—Dunlin, Buff-breasted Sandpiper; Region 8—Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Glossy Ibis; Region 9—Great Cormorant, Painted Bunting (Escape ?); Region 10—Black Brant, Bar-tailed Godwit, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Franklin's Gull, etc.

Two records deserve special mention. A Western Grebe was reported in Region 9. There were no verified records for the state although some of the dozen or so sight records are undoubtedly correct. This bird was sighted by two observers and, as far as I know, no photographs were obtained. It can not, therefore, be considered a fully satisfactory record. The acceptance of a record of any great

rarity requires either a specimen, a good, recognizable photograph (not merely a dot in the distance) or a sight record by a NUMBER of competent observers. The case of the Smith's Longspur on Long Island is quite different. The bird was identified in the field by a number of good observers, one of whom had seen the species before. The bird in the fall plumage is relatively obscure, however, and a specimen or photograph of the bird in the hand was absolutely necessary. A picture of the bird in the grass would not have been sufficient. Congratulations!

Millbrook School, Millbrook, N. Y. 12545

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

"... the fowls of the air ... shall tell thee" Today as an ecology-minded people, we heed *Job*, even using *Kingbird* records of avian norm-deviation as prediction of our own destiny.

The season was nearly average as to both temperatures and rainfall. On Sept. 23 the Southern Tier had an early killing frost, and traces of snow appeared Oct. 1. Up to 14 inches fell on Buffalo areas Nov. 15 and by the 30th, inland lakes were lightly frozen.

For the fall foodcrop, there was a fair supply of cherries and beechnuts, excellent hemlock fruit and water beech (*Carpinus*) in Catt Co (SE). Generally, Box Elder, Nannyberry and Wild Grape were abundant.

A weak migration began as 51 birds of 18 species were picked up Aug. 24 and 30 below a tower in T/Pomfret, Chaut Co with Canada Warblers the most common (FR, LBk). TV towers near Bflo killed 44 individuals of 12 species Aug. 28 and 30 with Blackburnian and Canada Warblers in highest numbers (ACK, RDS). Cold fronts set off major movements Sept. 14, 21 and 30, when 722 dead birds of 12 species, including 557 warblers of 8 species, fell below TV towers in S Erie Co (JT, ACK, AS, SW). Counts of the six most common were: 109 Bay-br. Warblers, 105 Ovenbirds, 89 Magnolia Warblers, 43 Red-eyed Vireos, 27 Nashville Warblers and 24 Black-thr. Green Warblers.

Keying in with this data and other observations as good migration periods are banding figures. At MorSom, Sept. 23-28, 258 birds of 45 species, including 70 warblers of 19 species, were banded with highest tallies: 44 Ruby-cr. Kinglets, 30 Swainson's Thrushes, 22 Magnolia Warblers, 21 White-thr. Sparrows, 17 Gray-chk. Thrushes and 10 Golden-cr. Kinglets (DK). At FrSt 569 individuals of 62 species were banded in Sept. through Nov. with highest counts in Sept., which included 29 Magnolia Warblers, 20 Gray Catbirds, 17 Red-eyed Vireos, 14 Black-cap. Chickadees, 10 Com. Yellowthroats and 10 Scarlet Tanagers. Of the 94 total warblers, 19 species were banded in Sept. and 6 in Oct., with Orange-cr. new and only Yellow-rumped increasing the latter month (DC, JC).

Seasonal rarities were: Eared Grebe, Harlequin Duck, King Eider, Goshawk, Bald Eagle, Merlin, Purple Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Western Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, all three Phalaropes, Parasitic Jaeger, Black-legged Kittiwake, Monk Parakeet, Barn Owl, Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, three Warblers: Prothonotary, Pine and Connecticut, and Sharp-tailed Sparrow.