

HURRICANES AND NEW YORK STATE BIRDS

JOHN B. BELKNAP

Any list of New York State birds includes a number of species classified as "accidental" or "casual" or perhaps called "stragglers." This indicates that they have been reliably recorded only once or twice, or at most a half-dozen times. A number of these have come to us as a result of West Indies hurricanes, usually pelagic birds normally found in southern waters.

Although the term "hurricane" was not used in this connection until about one hundred years ago, some remarks on birds made by DeWitt Clinton in 1814 are of interest: "There are some that stay with us the whole year — several that visit us occasionally or accidentally, which are driven by storms on our coast. Strange birds are frequently seen in the vicinity of the ocean after a storm."

Not many years later, in August 1831 a Royal Tern (*Thalasseus maximus*), no doubt our oldest extant specimen of a hurricane blown bird, was found on Long Island. The normal "hurricane season" comes in late summer and autumn, roughly the months of August, September and October.

It was in the 1870's that a definite association with this type of storm and the finding of West Indies or Caribbean strays was established. The tropical storm of Sept. 18, 1876, which passed inland over the state, left an immature White-tailed Tropic-bird (*Phaethon lepturus*) in Orleans County, our first record for this species. Both 1876 and 1878 were hurricane years and Sooty Terns (*Sterna fuscata*) were recorded in the state in September of both of these years.

The Black-capped Petrel (*Pterodroma hasitata*), rare even in the West Indies, is on the New York State list as a result of five specimens, three of them brought by late August hurricanes. Our only known specimen of the Manx Shearwater (*Puffinus puffinus*) is from Long Island, a bird found dead on August 30, 1917, one more victim of a tropical storm.

New York State has the distinction of having the only record of the South Trinidad Petrel (*Pterodroma arminjoniana*) known for North America. This was a hurricane blown waif found near Caroline Center, Tompkins County, after the storm of August 22, 1933. As occasionally happens, this storm veered inland, passing over the central part of the state.

In addition to the two species of terns already mentioned, another member of this subfamily is associated with tropical storms. This is the Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), recorded on Long Island on three occasions between 1957 and 1968. Specific data on hurricane driven birds may be found in John Bull's recent book, "Birds of New York State."

92 Clinton St., Gouverneur, N. Y. 13642

Editors note: The last Federation pelagic trip out of Montauk Point, Long Island, on June 7, 1975, sighted four Manx Shearwater.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

John B. Belknap is a Charter and Life Member of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs. He has been an active field observer for some fifty years. A frequent contributor to these pages, he was on *The Kingbird* editorial staff for the years 1956-1969. He lives in Gouverneur, N.Y., and his special interest is in avian population and census studies.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

We are starting a new feature called "*Letters to the Editors.*" Letters may be of a general nature as long as they pertain to New York State ornithology, or may be of a specific nature with reference to something that has appeared in *The Kingbird*. The editors reserve the right *not* to accept a letter for publication, or to edit a letter in accordance with space requirements. All letters received will be acknowledged. Your participation is invited.