

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

ROBERT W. SMART

There was absolutely no disagreement about the weather for the Spring Season. April was cold, snowy, and just plain rotten. The ever literate Dr. Scheider found the most appropriate quotation but I would extend it one line further: "mixing memory and desire." It seems that every year one remembers the glories of the past migrations and waits with growing frustration for the birds to arrive once again. No season could possibly live up to those lovely recollections of balmy, warbler-filled days. This year, however, there could be no doubt of the reality of the backward season. Notice the various comments concerning robins and phoebes in early April. The late snow forced other species to feed in flocks along the roadsides. One of the most spectacular migration sights in the Northeast—Derby Hill in late April—was wiped out in the cold, northerly winds coming off the lake.

May, on the other hand, tended to be warm or, at times, even hot. This undoubtedly helped the birds considerably but was not particularly good for the observers. The birds moved through rapidly with little build-up into spectacular "waves" so eagerly awaited by the observer. There were occasionally good numbers of warblers but they moved on very rapidly. By mid-May the migration dates seemed about normal. As usual, the migration continued well beyond the end of the month. Although June is usually considered part of the breeding season, some of the most interesting migration occurs during the first half of that month.

It was a very good season for southern herons away from the coast. Cattle Egrets made a particularly good showing. A very interesting report from Region 7 tells of four nesting at Four Brothers Islands on May 17. It is hoped that further details will be available in the next issue.

There seemed to be a general impression of an expansion of southern nesting species. The winter was very good for such species as Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Wren. This was reflected in this season's reports. However, other, non-wintering species showed this increase. Gnatcatchers, Prairie Warblers, Acadian Flycatchers, White-eyed Vireos and Orchard Orioles were all reported in increased numbers in various regions.

On the negative side, there were fewer reports of southern species

which do not breed in this area. This was particularly true in the coastal regions. Hugh McGuinness has been reporting the trend of recent years of the appearance of more and more of these specialties. In contrast, this season's numbers were quite low. Tom Burke predicted, after a trip to the Delmarva in late April, that if there were not a strong push from the south by early May there would be few birds left to overshoot their marks as most were already on territory. This is an interesting speculation on the timing of the warm fronts which proved to be quite true. Notice, however, some of the southern goodies from Region 10 topped by Purple Gallinule and Swainson's Warbler!

The reports of raptors are somewhat encouraging. The Cooper's and Red-shouldered Hawks seem to be making a slight come-back although this is not true for all regions. It is interesting that the New England Hawk Watch Committee reported a strong upswing for the latter species. Hopefully this will be a continuing trend.

Several other highlights may be picked at random from the following reports. White-fronted Geese turned up in three regions in what might almost be called a flight. Region 2 produced a Swainson's Hawk, Franklin's Gull and Black-legged Kittiwake. What a shame that the Common Teal in Region 3 now has to be called the Eurasian Green-winged Teal. I certainly hope that such birds as this, along with Bullock's Orioles, Oregon Juncos, and Ipswich Sparrows will continue to be reported. The Piping and Golden Plovers in Region 5 are fine records. Region 6 had two new regional records—Laughing and Black-headed Gulls—but I suspect that the Bohemian Waxwings would be the envy of most birders in the state. Three very interesting nesting records came at the end of the period. Philadelphia Vireo in Region 7. Bull lists only one positive breeding record and very few summer occurrences. In Region 9 a nest of Golden-crowned Kinglet was found. This bird is expanding as a breeding species in the state but this is much the furthest southeast that a nest has been found. Lastly, the first nesting of Chuck-will's-widow in the state occurred on Long Island. Also on Long Island, a pair of Gull-billed Terns was observed copulating. In this day and age this does not indicate a serious attempt to breed but one can hope that the first nest for this species will soon be found.

Region 1 reported one species which your Highlights Editor removed from the printed report. This was an adult Barnacle Goose at the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge. There is certainly no doubt

about the identification of this bird. The big question concerns its origin. It has been reported from the area previously, see Beardslee and Mitchell, *Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region*, but Axtell writing in the *Prothonotary* believes that they may well have been escaped birds. It is impossible to properly evaluate records of exotic waterfowl. Unfortunately, there is no Federal law requiring color marking of captive birds. Such a law would help to remove some of the questions surrounding this type of record.

And now for the moment that you have all been waiting for: the name of the winner of the BOTS award. Because of its extreme rarity, its difficulty of identification, and the fact that it made it through the rigors of the BOS Statisticians, the LeConte's Sparrow at Belvidere in Region 1 is the obvious winner.

In a future issue there will be a new list of deadlines for individual reports. In the meantime, please get your reports to the regional editors as soon as possible. It is much easier if done on a monthly basis. This gives everyone more time to work on the records.

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REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

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It was a grim April. Although Lake Erie was ice-free April 1st, the month was cold with a delayed winter storm arriving the 3rd and numbing the Region for a week. Birds flocked to feeders in unprecedented numbers and in the field congregated on available open ground where stupefied robins in particular showed little fear of observers. Following the storm came reports of phoebe and robin kills and generally lower numbers of flycatchers and swallows. The Allegany County Count was held as scheduled, but, because of the 13-inch snow cover in the snow belt, the Buffalo Ornithological Society Census was postponed a week. May was warm with frequent light rains but little total precipitation, and for the Regional Count, foliage was well advanced. Usual migrants for the first week of the month, especially insectivorous species, arrived about a week late at higher elevations.

Rarities for the spring are: Cattle Egret, Snowy Egret, White-fronted Goose, Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Laughing Gull, Barn Owl, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Common Raven (for Winter '74-'75), Prothonotary Warbler, Prairie Warbler, House Finch, and LeConte's Sparrow.

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