

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

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Where there was almost total agreement about the weather for the Spring Season, there were vast disagreements about the weather for the Summer. Three of the regions called it cool and wet; three regions thought it warm and wet; two regions were warm and dry; two regions averaged out to normal. Is it any wonder that your highlights editor has found it nearly impossible to spot any meaningful state-wide trends? Birds reported as increasing in one region were reported as down in others. Much of the data comes, of course, from the many local Breeding Bird Counts. In spite of the limitations of the techniques involved, they do permit a year-by-year comparison of species numbers in a given area. This is particularly true in those cases where the same observer has covered the same route for many years. Great care should be taken in drawing any wider conclusions, however. The results of these counts are dependent almost entirely on the ability of the individual observer to identify quickly and accurately the songs and chips of the nesting birds. This skill is probably more variable than any other in the birding world. Another problem is the date on which the count is made. Many of the counts are taken too early. There is still a strong migratory movement through mid-June, as has been proved by coastal banding records. By the time this migration has ceased and the remaining birds are certainly residents, the song period of many of the earlier nesters is over. A one-shot roadside breeding bird count is simply not an adequate sample.

There were a few areas of general agreement. Several regions reported good results in the local duck populations and an increase in lingering non-breeding species. Some of the latter may prove to be future nesters. Carolina Wrens continue to spread and increase. On the negative side there was major agreement that the grassland sparrows are in serious trouble. Grasshopper Sparrows seem to be holding their own but Henslow's and Savannah Sparrows are definitely down. The Vesper Sparrow is the disaster species, however. It was reported down seriously in many regions. Dr. Scheider suggests that this is the result of the planting of corn in areas that used to provide habitat for these sparrows. Horned Larks are also suffering for the same reason in Region Five. It would be interesting to know if this is the reason for the decline in the other regions. Another major

decline appears to be that of the two aerial insectivores, the Common Nighthawk and the Chimney Swift. None of the regional editors has ventured a guess as to the reasons for the decline. Continued spraying and growing urban air pollution come to mind but there is as yet no evidence to support this suggestion.

Most regions noted remarkably early arrival dates for fall migrants, and particularly for warblers. Many of these established new regional, and sometimes state, records. There was much less agreement concerning the shorebird migration. This was due, in part, to local variations in water levels. The inland areas varied from "miserable numbers and poor variety" in Region Five to "fantastic shorebirding" next door in Region Six. Similarly, it was "early and light" in Region One and "good numbers and variety" in Region Two.

Region Ten continues to lead the way with innovative counting procedures. Three years ago the compilers of the Captree Christmas Count decided to repeat the count in June, covering the same circle. Last year Northern Nassau picked up the idea and this year Central Suffolk joins the group. This is an activity that should be taken up by all of the Christmas Count compilers in the state. If this were done, thought would be given to a method for publishing them annually. Note also in Region Ten the interesting street-by-street count in the village of Sea Cliff. Other counts of note from this region are the results of the census of the tern, gull, and heron colonies on Long Island and the details of the various pelagic trips to Cox's Ledge and adjacent waters. There is a certain amount of argument as to which state has sovereignty over these waters but *The Kingbird* will continue to publish the records and New York State birders will continue either to list or not to list these birds depending on the strength of their morals *vs.* their listing needs.

Most of the regions have listed their seasonal rarities and it would be superfluous to repeat them here. The Sandhill Crane in Region One is certainly of state-wide interest as is the Purple Gallinule in Region Ten. Notice also the unusual shorebirds in many of the inland areas. The appearance of a Blue-winged Warbler in Golden-winged territory in Region Six brings up the interesting possibility of another hybrid zone for these warblers. It is also pleasing to note that the Gull-billed Terns in Region Ten were both serious and successful. The first state breeding record for Chuck-will's-widow is equally noteworthy. The two dark southern terns from this same region deserve comment. The "probable" Bridled Tern comes with a full

description so that the reader can judge whether the observer was being over-cautious, correctly questioning, or just plain wrong. Your editor tends to believe the first of these three possibilities and at the same time applauds the caution. The Sooty Tern on the other hand, while undoubtedly correct, was submitted with no details whatsoever. PLEASE include full details of all unusual records.

The BOTS award must go to the Long-billed Curlew, for several reasons. Although not a first state record, the 37-year hiatus since the last record makes it a possible first for a majority of the current birding population. It also served to call attention to that superb bit of habitat known as North Line Island. The variety and numbers of shorebirds listed in the Region Ten report show that the curlew was not the only reward for the intrepid mariner who braved the waters of South Oyster Bay.

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REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

Although warm and wet, this was a perfect summer to recapture a childlike closeness with nature. Average temperature for the season was 2.6° F. (1.4° C.) above normal. Total summer rainfall was 2.9 inches (7.4 cm.) above average, mostly falling in frequent light rains. Nearly three inches of rain fell June 3, 4, and 5 causing local flooding and some loss of young in nests. No repercussions were noted in the bird world from the heat wave and smog blanket of July 29-Aug. 5.

Positive notes include: 1) Com. Loon continuing as a summer regular at Chautauqua L; 2) early but very light shorebird and warbler flights and several waterfowl lingering late into summer; 3) better numbers of the Upland Sandpiper, Black-billed Cuckoo and Grasshopper Sparrow, and a steady increase of the Indigo Bunting; 4) surprisingly, in view of the wicked Apr '75 storm, only local variation in the status of the E. Phoebe (like the poetic cow-kicking of Nellie: it "didn't do her any good—didn't do her any harm."); 5) in Allegany Co: first documented nests of Sharp-shinned Hawk, Marsh Hawk and Nashville Warbler; well established breeding populations of Golden-crowned Kinglets, Yellow-rumped Warblers and White-throated Sparrows, with mounting evidence for inclusion of Black-throated Blue and Hooded Warblers; 6) higher numbers of avid avian observers, *all* reporting promptly; 7) in Cattaraugus Co: first report of the House Finch; and 8) a great food crop—high mouse and rabbit populations, heavy White Ash fruit, and an excellent berry supply.