

1975 FEDERATION STATEWIDE SPRING MIGRATION COUNT

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New York birders were out in force between May 9 and 25 for the Federation's 1975 spring migration count. At least 621 observers representing 21 member clubs (4 more than in 1974) and four groups of individuals participated in 26 different counts. The areas covered included portions of all of the state's ten Federation regions.

Despite the feeling of several groups that they missed the peak of migration, 260 species and one hybrid were reported. This total includes 21 species not observed in 1974, but since there were 10 species of 1974 which were not found in 1975 the net increase over 1974 was 11 species. The cumulative list for the two years stands at 270 species.

It is quite possible that the total number of species occurring in the state during the peak migration period mounts as high as 288. Admittedly this number includes several uncommon, rare and hard-to-find migrants but it may be considered an attainable goal.

This year counts were made in the Adirondack areas where all the northern specialties except Boreal Chickadee were noted. There is no doubt they were present as they are fairly common permanent residents.

The principal deficiency in species continues to be among the sea birds which comprise at least half of the species probably present but not yet found. Pelagic counts during the spring count would make a significant addition to the list by adding such species as shearwaters, storm petrels, eiders, scoters, phalaropes and jaegers.

Notable "misses" for both years have been Gray Partridge, American Golden Plover, Whimbrel, Short-eared Owl, Yellow-throated Warbler and Blue Grosbeak. Species recorded in 1974 but missed in 1975 were Red-throated Loon, Common Eider, Surf Scoter, Merlin, Hudsonian Godwit, Ruff, Glaucous Gull, Little Gull, Orange-crowned Warbler and Summer Tanager.

New species added this year were Red-necked Grebe, Gannet, Whistling Swan, Fulvous Tree Duck, Rough-legged Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Spruce Grouse, King Rail, Purple Gallinule, American Oystercatcher, Stilt Sandpiper, Gull-billed Tern, Barn Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Chuck-will's-widow, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, Northern Three-toed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Raven, Short-billed Marsh Wren and Fox Sparrow. Several unusual observations were submitted

without supporting details and thus could not be accepted for the list—these included such species as Merlin, Connecticut Warbler, Dickcissel and Common Redpoll. Reports were received of Monk Parakeet and Chukar but these are introduced species not yet well established in the state. For this reason they were deleted from the list.

The most unusual species reported were the six Fulvous Tree Ducks at Baiting Hollow Marsh, Long Island, the Purple Gallinule in Brookhaven, Long Island, and the four Gull-billed Terns (including a pair) at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge. The counts were sprinkled with other highlights—Glossy Ibis and Whistling Swans were reported from the western part of the state as were late Rough-legged Hawks throughout that area.

This year both Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon were sighted, and a breeding-plumaged Stilt Sandpiper turned up at Jamaica Bay. There were two Wilson's Phalaropes in western counties. Six species of owls were ferreted out statewide, possibly an indication of a more intensive effort to seek out these nocturnal birds. A concentration of ten Short-billed Marsh Wrens at the north end of Cayuga Lake was reported by two counting groups. A pair of Acadian Flycatchers in Dutchess County is noteworthy as this species rarely nests in the state. Brewster's Warbler, the more common of the two *Vermivora* warbler hybrids, was found by three groups. A Western Meadowlark appeared in the Rochester area where it has become almost a regular visitor for several years past. Single Orchard Orioles were reported on several counts. Tree Sparrows were spotted by two groups and three lingering Fox Sparrows were in the Watertown area. Both Double-crested Cormorant and Cattle Egret were unusual records in Essex County and complete the complement of noteworthy sightings.

Incredibly, only *one* Caspian Tern was located in the entire state, and Loggerhead Shrikes were found on only two counts. A few reports did not include Rock Dove, Starling and House Sparrow; some did not specify the species of scaup or yellowlegs, or did not differentiate as to whether a "Traill's" Flycatcher was Alder or Willow.

The number of species reported on counts ranged from 71 to 189 with an average of 124 on the 26 counts. The highest count was the work of the Buffalo Ornithological Society in Region 1 (except for Allegany County). From Region 2 came the second highest count of 186 species compiled by the joint efforts of the Genesee Ornithological Society and the Rochester Birding Association. The number of

observers statewide ranged from a single individual (who recorded 82 species) to 136.

This year count compilers were requested to report the number of individuals of each species, and 17 counts contained this information. Those who chose not to report number, and some who did, raised objections to this procedure. They pointed out that traditionally the spring Big Day goal has been to cover as many habitats and places, and to accumulate as long a species list as possible while having fun at the same time. It is argued that these objectives do not lend themselves to complete censusing or consistent sampling of an area, and that there are so many variable factors involved as to make the statistical value of numbers as applied to migrating species very questionable. At the annual meeting last fall there was a spirited debate on this question of "to count or not to count." There was strong defense of both points of view. No definite action was taken but there appeared to be considerable opinion that while counting of all species is difficult and of questionable validity and value it might be well to designate for counting those species which seem to be in precarious or changing status—such as raptors, Loggerhead Shrike, and Acadian Flycatcher. The matter will receive further consideration. It has also been suggested that when an unusual species is found the number of individuals should be included in the verification report.

There was also discussion of whether a breeding bird count of some sort might be productive of meaningful data—either instead of, or in addition to the Big Day counts.

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N.B. A list of species seen by all participating groups can be secured for 35¢ from Gordon Meade at the above address. The price is to cover the cost of postage and Xeroxing.