

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

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All of the regions were in nearly perfect agreement as to the spring weather but differed widely on the effects of this weather. March and April were warmer than usual, with a genuine heat wave in the latter part of April. May was cold and wet with a winter-like storm on the 19th that brought snow to the higher parts of the state. Both of these extremes produced negative results for the birder in the field. The lovely warm weather that everyone greeted with such enthusiasm brought a rush, not of migrants, but of rapidly burgeoning foliage, so that when the warblers did arrive they were nearly invisible in the greenery. It was one of the most difficult springs in memory for seeing birds. The late cold hit many of the early nesting birds and the insectivores. Flycatchers were reported as being in low numbers and swallows may be in serious trouble. Note also the comments on Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers in Region 8.

The following brief comments will give some idea of the impossibility of adequately summarizing a migration over an area as large as New York State: "tremendous Spring season" (Region 2), "Silent Spring" (Region 10), "Good warblers" (Region 1), "Warblers trickled through" (Region 3), "Some warblers above average, some very low" (Region 5), "Residents normal, poor transients" (Region 9). Your impression of the spring migration obviously depended on where and when you were. It was interesting that two of the regions (3 and 5) commented on the effects of rain on the migration as seen from the ground. As has been mentioned before, ground observations do not always, or even often, reflect the true picture of the overhead migration. A rain storm in the midst of a flight will cause the birds to "drop out" and be recorded. Unfortunately, all too many birders are "fair-weather birders" and miss many of the really good days.

A major feature of the season was the incursion of southern species into the state. This was particularly noticeable in the upstate regions. The coastal area is more accustomed to these birds as is shown by the lack of emphasis on the hoards of southern warblers, etc., in the regional report. Much of the state was enchanted, however, with Prothonotaries, Yellow-throateds, Kentuckys, chats, and other southern species. Even the most jaded of New Yorkers must have been impressed by the 14 individual Summer Tanagers. Acadian Flycatchers seem to be continuing their advance into the state as possible or

proven breeding birds. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers were found breeding 100 miles north of their previous range in Region 7. Carolina Wrens seem to have survived the winter and maintained their increasing population.

At the other end of the geographic spectrum some northerners made news. Boreal Chickadees remained into the spring period and there was a decent return flight of northern finches. I do not know what to make of the reported "pair" of Pine Grosbeaks at Connetquot River State Park on Long Island on April 25, claimed to be present until mid-May. John Bull in *Birds of New York State* lists two May records in upstate New York but certainly nothing from the coast where they are not common even in the winter. Red Crossbills were seen with recently fledged young in Region 9, which may be the first proven successful nesting in the state. Tree Sparrows established a number of remarkably late dates with May 1 in Region 9, May 10 in Region 5, May 13 in Region 1, May 15 in Region 8 and May 16 in Regions 2 and 3. John Bull lists May 11 as the extreme late date for the state. Any one of the above records might be suspect, but the pattern is incontrovertible.

Another interesting flight pattern is shown by the Blue Jay reports from Regions 1, 2, and 5. These counts of 5000, 2000 and 8000 in mid-May point up an aspect of the spring migration that is frequently overlooked by the more warbler-orientated observers. The Derby Hill count exceeds by 2000 the maximum listed in *Birds of New York State*.

At the risk of inflating the already sufficient local pride, Derby Hill must once again be mentioned as one of the most exciting places in the northeast to observe diurnal migration in the spring. Hawk-watching addicts will need no more than a glance at the table in the Region 5 report to start making plans for a visit next year. The passerine passage is no less impressive and many have been torn between counting hawks and observing "twits." It is the only place where your editor has ever seen Boreal Chickadees and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers in the same small tree.

One region's rarity may be another region's commonplace, but the vast array of species that were underlined by the regional editors boggles the mind. There was a total of 80—count 'em, 80—individual species in this category. The prize for being underlined in the most number of regions goes to the Orchard Oriole with five nominations. Several of the underlined (set in bold face) species will cause some

raised eyebrows including, it must be admitted, those of your editor. The Arctic Loon in Region 2 has a couple of precedents but the extreme difficulty of identification is well known. There is only one specimen for the state. The Baird's Sandpiper from the same region must be considered as hypothetical in view of the fact that there is no spring specimen known from the state, although Beardslee and Mitchell (*Birds of the Niagara Frontier Region*) do list some spring sight records. Field guides are notoriously poor in showing the large variety in shorebird plumages due to age, sex and season. Likewise the record of the Arctic Tern from Region 3 should be treated with some caution. Bull, for very good reasons, accepts no sight records for the state and lists only three specimens, all from the coast. The possible specimen mentioned by Beardslee and Mitchell is not extant. The species is certainly identifiable in the field by those experienced with the *Sterna* terns. Those interested in this fascinating problem in field identification should consult the recent articles in *California Birds* and *British Birds*. As noted in the regional report, the details of the observation are on file.

Two other species which were not officially reported merit attention. The Carolina Chickadee has never been accepted as a New York State record and Region 3 very properly did not report it as a fact. It is amazing that a species that breeds as close to the state as this one does has never been taken within the state boundaries. There have been several instances of birds singing the typical song. If another such bird appears at a feeder in the future and you do not wish to trap it for a specimen, PLEASE get a good tape recording of the song so that a sonogram may be made from it. This should be sufficient evidence for a validation of the record. Another very probable record was that of a Green-tailed Towhee in Nunda observed by W. and M. Barber. Although the local committee did not accept it for a first regional record, the chances are that it was perfectly good. Birds of this species turned up in Maine and New Jersey during the winter and it was a remarkable season for western birds in the East.

Those of you who have been following the recipients of the BOTS award must realize by now that this is a very personal and, perhaps, biased choice. Criteria of rarity—time, place, species—fade before two overall concepts: What bird was I most thrilled to see or what sighting am I most envious of others having seen. Using the latter criterion, the BOTS award must be given to the Swallow-tailed Kite seen at Derby Hill. Congratulations to those who were lucky enough to have seen it.