

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

ROBERT W. SMART

Except for Region 10, which always goes its own way, the word that every regional editor used was WET. Dr. Scheider in Region 5 went so far as to refer to "the summer of the monsoon." June, in many places, was warm to hot, but July and August cool. The weather pattern managed to dry out somewhat in late August.

There was less agreement on the effects of summer's weather. Most editors agreed that it was bad but their reasons differed. Nest hunters were severely hampered by the heavy foliage and the lack of song. Some species delayed their nesting or were forced to second attempts after the destruction of the first nest. In agricultural areas, planting was delayed and haying was late, to the detriment of the various grassland species. Birders, as well as birds, were affected by all the rain and great credit must be given to the faithful who went out on the Breeding Bird Surveys and maintained an unbroken series of records.

The evaluation of the effects of the weather on water birds depended on the type of habitat where the observer usually found the birds. Most regions reported a poor shorebird flight because the normal flats were covered with water. Care should be taken in interpreting these results, however. The best tidal flats on Long Island also had fewer shorebirds than in past years. In contrast, Region 6 had excellent shorebirds in flooded fields. Many regions had excellent heron numbers and species, but it is impossible to say whether this is a result of the high water levels.

One other feature of the summer birding may be related to the cool, wet season. A number of regions reported very early, or record fall migration dates for southbound northern nesters. If this was a result of nesting failure in the breeding areas, the flight next spring could be rather poor.

There were a number of encouraging signs this summer. For a number of years the Waterman Bird Club in Dutchess Co. has sponsored a bluebird nesting box project. This year was their best ever: 66 nesting pairs with 35 pairs successful. Short-billed Marsh Wrens were more numerous than in past years and Henslow's Sparrow numbers were slightly up in several regions. Some areas reported a gain in the Savannah Sparrow population but this was not a general trend. The plight of the Vesper Sparrow, as noted in previous years, continues

to worsen. Is there any possibility of creating managed areas on unused farm land for this species?

The spread of some southern forms continues. Acadian Flycatchers were reported from many areas. The localized Dutchess Co. population is increasing and two active nests were kept under observation. The presence of Willow Flycatchers in two places in Region 7 is part of the trend of this species to move to the northeast. Care should be taken to note whether the Alder Flycatcher is slowly withdrawing from the more southerly portions of its range. In an opposite direction Golden-crowned Kinglets are breeding further south and in the coastal region we have breeding records for Pine Siskin and Winter Wren.

Many of the rarities reported from the individual regions would have qualified for the Bird of the Season award if a "lady" named Belle had not breezed through the southeastern part of the region on the night of Aug. 9-10. Rare birds are, of course, a function of the region in which they are found and it is most difficult to evaluate on a state-wide level. The Prairie Warblers from upstate would create no excitement in the southern sections and the before mentioned Winter Wren on Long Island would be noted only in passing in the mountains. Certain species caused comment in many regions. Whimbrels were reported in four inland regions. Cattle Egrets, along with most of the southern herons, were listed as outstanding in at least five non-coastal regions. Other rarities listed for more than one region include Northern and Wilson's Phalaropes, Barn Owl, Bald Eagle, Kentucky Warbler, and Orchard Oriole. Region 1 added Prothonotary and Worm-eating Warbler to the rare warbler list. Region 2 hit the jackpot with the observation of Wood Storks which rather overshadowed the record of a Ruff. A Clay-colored Sparrow on a Region 4 BBS raises some interesting possibilities. Certainly one of the most remarkable reports for the season was the Greater Shearwater flying north up the Hudson River south of Albany. What a wonderful bird to add to your yard list if you live that far inland. It would almost make gardening worthwhile. The bird had the poor taste to come to rest on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain rather than remaining in New York where it belonged.

(Note: If some of your favorite records do not appear in *The Kingbird*, do not always blame your Regional Editor. Some birds are removed from the regional reports by the Highlights Editor for reasons of space, questions of identifiability of the form reported at

the given season, or lack of convincing details for a very improbable record. Mistakes are certainly made in these judgments. Theoretically nothing is impossible in the birding world. Ludlow Griscom is quoted as having said, "Birds have wings and sometimes use them!" It is thought better to err on the side of caution, however, in such a journal of record as *The Kingbird*.)

Hurricane Belle, which hit the south shore of Long Island on the night of Aug. 9-10, was the source of a number of interesting records, particularly for those who observed the rule that one gets into the field as soon as it is possible to stand up after the storm's passage. Naturally the coastal region had most of the goodies but a number of inland reports are due to the storm. Least Terns were seen on the 10th in Region 8 and on the 15th in Region 6. The Black Skimmer and Royal Tern in Region 9 on the 10th were certainly storm driven but the skimmer in Region 8 on Aug. 6th must be given credit for forecasting the storm far in advance of the Weather Bureau. On the morning after the storm, 15 Cory's Shearwaters and both Wilson's and Leach's Storm-petrels were seen under a bridge over Shin-neck Bay. The best bird of the area was a Bridled Tern nearby. A Sandwich Tern was seen the following day.

By far the best bird of the storm, and the uncontested winner of the BOTS award, was seen by two observers at Croton Point on the Hudson River in Region 9 when a lengthy vigil was rewarded by the sight of an adult Yellow-nosed Albatross scaling up the river 30 feet offshore. Your envious editor offers his heartiest congratulations through a mist of tears.

*Millbrook School, Millbrook, New York 12545*

## REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

Most of summer was a continual dropping, like a contentious woman: June—hot and wet—, July—lukewarm and wet—, August 1 to 13—so-so and wet—. Then at last, two hot, sunny weeks were especially sweet and spirits rose like the hawks suddenly soaring the skies. Heavy vegetation hid nests, as well as a bumper mouse population, and made rough going for the shanks' mare birder.

From 17, out of 19, of the 25-mile (40.2 km) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS, hereafter) conducted in the region for the 10th year (WK), 114 species and