

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Lark Sparrow in Ontario County: On December 3, 1976, a Lark Sparrow was first observed by my father at a feeder at our home in Clifton Springs, Ontario County. The bird had a white throat bordered with black, and bordered again with white, along with a chestnut cheek patch and chestnut crown stripes; between the chestnut cheek and the crown was another creamy stripe, and there was a median crown stripe, also creamy-white. A conspicuous central breast spot was evident, more prominent than that of the Tree Sparrow. The back was grayish, and the tail was rounded, the outer tail feathers being conspicuously white. The bird spent its time (one-half hour observation) either perched in a pine tree or on the feeder eating seed.

According to John Bull (1974, *Birds of New York State*, pp. 581-582), the Lark Sparrow winters chiefly in the southern United States and south to El Salvador, and very rarely along the Atlantic coast north to southeastern New York. It is a rare but regular fall migrant along the coast, much rarer in the spring, and very rare in the interior. All six birds recorded by Bull from the interior were spring birds. The present record appears to be the first fall or winter Lark Sparrow in the interior of New York State, and only the seventh inland record.

The bird remained in the area for several days, and was last seen on December 11, a day marked by temperatures above 50° F. (10° C.), warm breezes, and little or no snow cover. The identification was verified by Cathy Walsh, Matthew Trail and Walter Benning, and the bird was photographed by Paris Trail (photograph on file at the American Museum of Natural History, New York).

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Franklin's Gull on the St. Lawrence River: On 2 January 1977 at Oak Point, St. Lawrence Co., I observed a Franklin's Gull for a period of an hour and a half, while the bird was at rest and in flight. This gull had a uniformly brownish-gray mantle with a trailing wing edge of white. There was a distinct diagonal, white slash separating the brownish-gray wings from black wing tips. The tail was entirely white. The head pattern could best be described as mottled. The black markings and streakings were limited to, but covered most of, the crown and cheek. The black extended right up to a prominent half eye-ring. The occiput, nape, forehead, lore, and chin were white. The lower mandible shape gave the bill a stout or full look, but it was my impression that it was not as stout as that of the Laughing Gull. Prior to these observations a general sense of size was noted. Although it was only in the company of Great Black-backed Gulls, I was able to judge its size directly as four separate Common Goldeneyes passed behind this gull. At this time the gull was resting on the edge of the ice and open water. One goldeneye was the same size as the gull, but the gull was smaller than each of the other three ducks.

To summarize, this was a small, extensively hooded gull with a uniformly

dark mantle that was interrupted by a distinct, diagonal, white slash near the black wing tips.

Previous winter sightings were in the Buffalo area on 26 December 1955 and 23 December 1967. Fritz Scheider observed a gull of this species on 3 January 1960 at Oswego Harbor (Bull, 1974, *Birds of New York State*, p. 284).

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Gull predation on an ant swarm: On September 13, 1976 at approximately 1600, I was driving south over the Captree Bridge which spans Great South Bay, Suffolk Co., when I noticed insects striking my windshield in numbers reminiscent of past trips to the central plains states of North America. When I got off the bridge and headed west on Ocean Parkway along the Jones Beach strip, I found Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls feeding on the flying insects, which by now I had determined to be some sort of flying ant. The aerial hunting technique of the Herring Gulls was notable in that they would circle very slowly through the ant swarm, flare out their wings, drop their tails in a braking action, and then snap at the flying ants with a lunging thrust. Laughing Gulls were now seen flying through the swarm, and together with the Ring-billed Gulls, performed aerial acrobatics in capturing the ants in flight. These two species appeared to be much more adept in feeding than the larger Herring Gulls.

The wind was quite calm at the time and remained so throughout the time period of this field report.

Proceeding west toward Jones Beach State Park, I realized after driving for about one mile and seeing a constant number of insect-eating gulls in the air that I was witnessing an enormous ant swarm whose proportions I had never before seen. The swarm of ants was relatively constant all the way to Zachs Bay, a distance of about 8 miles from Captree. I roughly censused the gulls in relation to the major geographical areas of the Jones Beach strip and the results from east to west are as follows:

	Captree	Oak Beach	Gilgo	Tobay	Zachs Bay	Total
Herring Gull	300	450	250	100	100	1200
Ring-billed Gull	200	150	100	200	200	850
Laughing Gull	200	200	100	200	150	850
	700	800	450	500	450	2900

Large numbers of the swarming ants were evidently falling on the water on the bay side of the parkway, for the gulls were feeding at the surface. The Herring and Ring-billed Gulls were feeding while sitting on the water, but the Laughing Gulls fed by picking the ants off the surface while in flight. As dusk approached, all three species of gulls continued to feed on the swarm on the ground. Whether the ant swarm was descending to the ground or whether the gulls could not see the flying ants in failing light, I could not determine. Several gulls were killed by automobiles while dashing here and there in pursuit of ants,