

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

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After a wretched winter, the warm, dry weather of early March was greeted with open arms by all observers. All regions reported precipitation to be normal or low. In early April and early May there were reports of cool (or cold) and wet periods, but the overall impression of the season was warm and dry with the emphasis on the "dry." The snow on May 9th brought back horrid memories of the winter, but that mess vanished rapidly under the warm, almost hot, sun of the last part of the month. One of the less obvious benefits of the early warm weather is mentioned with understated joy by the editor of Region 7—the early demise of the snowmobiles!

Unfortunately, however, the pleasant spring weather did not produce good birding. The age-old statement that "fair-weather" birders do not see many birds was proven true once again. But this time it was not the birders' fault. Except in the parks in New York City, the migration was reported as being very poor. For most birders this comment means that there were not the waves of small landbirds—warblers, thrushes, etc., that had been dreamed of all winter long. Many people blamed the extreme cold of the winter for the lack of birds, but they forget that the great majority of these species winter far south of the United States and away from the northern winter weather. There were no cold fronts or evening rains to force the overhead migrants down to the ground where they could be observed. As noted by the editor for Region 5, passage migrants moved through very rapidly. There were many evenings in Dutchess County when large numbers of chips from migrants were heard but on the following morning there were very few migrants to be found in the field. Birders should pray for some bad weather during the spring migration.

Another great problem resulted from the early warm weather. The leaves may have been lovely to look at but they certainly hid the small birds in the treetops. Compounding the difficulties was the remarkable silence of the migrants. Nearly everybody commented on the lack of song. The only area that benefited from the lush early foliage was the barrier beaches of Long Island, where migrants were more numerous than usual.

The effect of weather conditions on local migration is very well documented by the editor for Region 2. The warm high-pressure

systems were so large that the pressure gradient was weak. As a result, lakeshore breezes developed to offset the southerly flow of air, and ruined the normal concentration of hawks and landbirds. The major exception to this pattern occurred on April 21, producing record flights along the lakeshores. Note the very similar hawk counts from Regions 2 and 5. Last year I commented on the attractions of Derby Hill in the spring. This year I was fortunate to have picked April 21 for my only visit. It was a fabulous choice!

Another ornithogeographical effect is noted in Region 2. This is the "Lakeshore Concentration"—not of birds but of birders. This is related to the "Weekend Syndrome" which results in most arrival dates for migrants occurring on Saturdays or Sundays. Birds are reported only when and where the birders are. Both physical and temporal coverage is unfortunately spotty, as the following records show. However, the situation is improving.

The one report that runs counter to the general dismal passerine picture was that from Forest Park in Queens County. Such phrases as "clouds of birds" and "hundreds of birds" are nearly incomprehensible to most of the birders in the state this spring. Central Park in Manhattan has long been known as a great migrant trap. Forest Park partisans claim that their park consistently produces greater concentrations of individual migrants, and yearly records of most of the southern wanderers. The reports from Region 10 will support this claim. It is also a very pleasant urban birding area.

It is always hard to find state-wide trends in the regional reports. What is true for some areas will nearly always be contradicted in others. Region 7 comments on the very large number of Saw-whet Owls, whereas Region 2 says that Saw-whets were "very low." Nearly all areas reported low numbers of species that winter within the United States, with particular comments on Eastern Phoebes. Swallows were generally reported as low, particularly Bank, Rough-winged and Cliff; a positive note from Region 6 reports 600+ nests of the latter species, however. Most areas had continuing low counts of nighthawks but Region 9 had good numbers over Newburgh. The White-crowned Sparrow flight was superb throughout the state with the exception of Region 2 (where they had a good swallow flight) and all upstate regions report dramatic increases in House Finches. Other species which seem to be expanding their range, or, in some cases, recolonizing, are Turkey (due to reintroduction), Raven, Acadian Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and White-eyed Vireo.

The following are random thoughts and quotes from the individual regions. These are in no way a substitute for the original reports which are, after all, the heart and soul of the seasonal records. Region 1 had an early Yellow-bellied Flycatcher on May 7 and a very late Tree Sparrow on May 15. Please note also the excellent quote from Harold Axtell about "ecologically ignorant bird lovers," who are shooting hawks and shrikes at their private feeding stations. The meaning of the word "sanctuary" should be relearned.

Region 2 reports a remarkable count of 1210 Red-necked Grebes and 60 Western Sandpipers. Note the low Black Duck numbers as compared to Mallards—a point that has been raised in previous issues. The Thayer's Gull problem is still with us but note the comments in a recent issue of *American Birds*.

Region 3 produced a very well described Arctic Tern record. This is a very difficult species to prove in the field and none of the current guides mention all of the diagnostic points. The best information that I know of was published in the first issue of *California Birds*; it describes in words *and* photographs the differences in bill size and shape, length of head and neck, wing pattern, etc. This record of April 23 is given support by the report of Arctic Terns in Region 4 on April 24. There will always be some questions raised about identification of this species away from its breeding areas, no matter who the observer is.

An interesting note from Region 5 reports low cuckoo numbers in spite of a heavy infestation of tent caterpillars. A good food supply does not always produce the birds. Read also the delightful description of 100 singing Least Flycatchers in one small area.

Region 6 supplies a heartening report of Black-crowned Night Herons being "very common" in two areas. This species is generally in very poor shape. Also good news was the report of some improvement in numbers of Gray Partridge after the severity of the previous winter. Black Ducks were again well done as compared to Mallards.

Region 7 calls attention to the problem of Common Loon nesting areas in regions of increasing development. The Audubon Society of New Hampshire has just started experimenting with artificial nesting islands and this concept might be introduced into some of our up-state lakes if it works. Attention was also drawn to the decrease of Black Terns, reported by Robbins *et al.* to be declining by 12% a year in the East. Region 5 also commented on this. An early March 15th Broad-winged Hawk was balanced by a late May 25th Glaucous Gull.

Region 8 remarks on continued improvement in Goshawk, Cooper's and Osprey reports. Region 9 comments on the increasing number of Goshawk nests, and tells of an April 7th Chimney Swift.

Region 10 had Long-eared Owls breeding on Long Island for the first time in 40 years, and also had breeding-plumaged Little Gulls and Long-billed Dowitchers. The Eastern Kingbird on April 12 was remarkably early.

Most of the regions have highlighted their own rarities in the introductory paragraphs so they need not be mentioned here. A few goodies to whet your appetites are White-fronted Goose in Regions 1 and 9; Black Vulture, Buff-breasted Sandpiper (first spring record for the state) and a singing Lark Bunting in Region 5, Marbled Godwit and three singing Clay-colored Sparrows in Region 6 and a calling Sandhill Crane in Region 7.

There were several birds in Region 10 which might qualify for the BOTS award. The list was finally narrowed down to two. The Boat-tailed Grackle should occur more often as it is expanding its range slowly up the coast and should be seen more often. The palm, or feather if you will, therefore goes to the breeding-plumaged male Townsend's Warbler, a worthy recipient in any field of competitors.

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REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

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After the bone-wearying winter of '77, with its record lows and snows, a gentle Spring was most welcome. March temperatures and precipitation were nearly normal and small lakes were ice-free about mid-month, earlier than usual. Very dry weather the first three weeks of April retarded vegetation, but for the month, rainfall averaged only .6 in. (1.5 cm.) below the norm and temperatures were 1.4° F (.8° C) above the expected. Lake Erie reached 32° F on April 15 when the ice boom moved out four days earlier than last year. What is more rare than two weeks of June arriving in May? In contrast to the snowstorm May 9, which ended the strong frontal systems, temperatures for the month averaged 4.8° F (2.7° C) above normal, and precipitation totaled 1.5 in. (3.9 cm.) below the usual.

Spring positives abound: 1) many early arrivals, a reflection of the smiling season; 2) a fair representation, but generally low numbers, of the large fish-eating birds, indicating a cautious optimism; 3) excellent swan and duck flights, but a mediocre goose migration; 4) good reports of Turkey Vultures, Marsh Hawks and Ospreys; 5) Turkey survival good,