

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

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The Summer Season is probably the hardest, if not impossible, to summarize on a state-wide basis. Everything becomes much more "local" at this season. Weather conditions in one region may differ greatly from those in a neighboring region. Conditions which are good for one area will produce poor results in another. As a case in point note that Region 1 called June "cold with normal rain" and Region 2 called it "warm and dry." Region 5 called August "cool and very wet" and Region 9 was "warm and dry." The effects of these variations produced equal variations in the reports of birdlife. Please read with particular care the introductory remarks by the editor for Region 2, Robert Spahn, on the interaction of weather and habitat as it affects the numbers of birds. Also note his comments on the changing pattern of the observations. The reported numbers do not by any means tell the full story of fluctuations in the real populations. As an extreme case, Region 7 reported killing frosts in all three months.

The unusual weather patterns created a chaotic summer, a season normally thought to be rather stable with birds breeding where they should and few surprises to be expected. This was a summer of migration. Dr. Scheider in Region 5 says that there was no week without migrants present in the Region. This was true for nearly all of the state. A particularly obvious example was the shorebird migration in which spring migrants and fall returnees overlapped each other on the same flat. It was often impossible to know if a certain individual was on his way north, on his way south, or was just resting there saying to hell with this migration nonsense. Which way was the White-rumped Sandpiper going in Region 5 on June 30?

This same problem occurs with the northern land birds. Migration continued so late that in many cases it was very hard to determine whether an individual species was remaining as a nesting bird or merely very tardy on his northward journey. This question casts some doubt on the results of the Breeding Bird Surveys as was mentioned last year. There is no doubt that a number of the more northerly breeding species are breeding further and further south—flycatchers, both kinglets, vireos, some warblers, *etc.*—but a singing bird in the proper habitat in late June could well be a migrant. As Ludlow Griscom once pointed out, it still takes two birds of opposite sex to

produce a breeding record. Note the increases of boreal species in the upstate areas however.

Another anomaly in this "breeding" season is the protracted hawk migration. At Braddock's Bay in Region 2, the hawk lookout was manned throughout the month of June and small numbers of birds were recorded throughout the period. Two Broad-wings were migrating over Derby Hill as late as July 7. On August 13, Region 2 recorded a remarkable movement of immature Red-tails with 317 moving west at Kendall and 74 moving east at Braddock's Bay. This type of Red-tail movement in mid-August has been reported before from the area and greeted with scepticism by many including your Highlights Editor; apologies are in order. A real effort should be made to determine the source and pattern of this flight. What are we to think of the Merlin on Aug. 4 in Region 7 and on Aug. 16 in Region 3? I wish that we had details on both of these observations.

The effect of the severe winter is rather difficult to assess. The one point of general agreement is that the Carolina Wren population was very hard hit, to the extent of being wiped out in some areas. This is a classic pattern for the species—slow gains to the north and then everything is lost during a hard winter. Other southerners seemed to make out somewhat better but most were lower in numbers in many areas. One of the winter effects noted was the decline of species that winter in the southern United States compared to little change in those that winter in South and Central America. Oddly enough, in spite of the very heavy snow cover, the Gray Partridges in Region 6 have increased. It is hard to pinpoint the cause of decreasing bird populations. The loss of the Black Rails from Long Island was almost certainly not due to the previous winter.

Several regions reported Bald Eagles during the summer. This is most encouraging and the source of these would be interesting to determine. I doubt very much that they represent the northern breeding population. Southern birds have been captured in the Northeast after post-breeding dispersal. It would be nice to think that at least some of these are the result of the active breeding program which is being continued.

Ravens are expanding rapidly in northern New York and have now become well established in their usual areas and are spreading to others. Increasing numbers of breeding Barn Owls are being reported from many areas to the great horror of the rodent population. Ospreys had a good season on eastern Long Island and adjacent islands.

Goshawks are nesting in increasing numbers and there were over 30 Red-tail nests found in the Millbrook-Stamford area of Dutchess County. Some very fine work is being done on the breeding hawks of eastern Dutchess County, and contiguous areas of northwestern Connecticut, by a group of dedicated young men who spend most of their time in the woods searching for hawk nests. The results have been astounding. Turkey Vultures seem to be increasing and spreading. Red-shouldered and Cooper's Hawks still are in deep trouble.

Passerine fluctuations do not show many clear statewide trends. Acadian Flycatchers continue their remarkable range extension, gnatcatchers are increasing and House Finches seem to be actually replacing the House Sparrow in some areas—Good Luck! Many birds, however, were reported to be up in some areas and down in others. Examples of these are Eastern Bluebird, American Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, Common Nighthawk, and Black Tern.

A word of caution on some of the cuckoo reports. It is becoming more and more well known that the Black-billed Cuckoo can give a call which is, to most ears, nearly identical to that of the Yellow-billed. There are short call notes of both which are indistinguishable. A definitive paper on these vocalizations is badly needed, but until one is readily available, great care should be exercised in identifying cuckoos by note alone.

Many of the other comments have been made in these pages so often that it is no longer necessary to repeat them in detail, or at all. The plight of the Black Duck, the troubles of the grassland sparrows, the hybridization of the "winged" warblers, *etc.*, are all documented in the following pages. There is also not enough space for a complete listing of all of the "goodies" from the various regions but the editors have highlighted them in each report, both in their introductions and in the bodies of the reports. Search them out—you will find them exciting, with your particular attention directed to the Anhinga in Region 10, which record will now appear on the Hypothetical List for New York State.

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