

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

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The Fall of 1977 was certainly a bad one for the "fair-weather birders." Nearly all of the regional reporters made it clear that it was a wretched season with much more than normal rainfall; often occurring on weekends, when most observers can be afield. The reports of the migration, therefore, probably do not represent the real picture. Most regions reported a poor migration of thrushes, vireos, warblers, etc., but notice the large number of birds killed at the Elmira Tower in Region 3 and the reports of many chip-notes heard overhead in Region 5, the latter probably a function of persistent low clouds and mist. On such nights thousands of unidentifiable chips may be heard, with very few birds in evidence the following day. It might be very interesting to set up an organized effort to count these chip-notes during the active migration period, to determine the peaks of the flight. Exact species identification would not be important; the volume of the flight would be very useful.

The very wet weather affected not only the birders but also the habitat; most of the upstate regions complained bitterly of poor shorebirding. The usual flats and pond edges were drowned with the excess water. The low duck counts in some areas may well be another result. If ducks can find remote backwaters in which to rest, they will avoid some of the more usual, and populated, areas. All in all, the normal migration patterns and observations were badly disrupted by the inclement weather.

In a state of such diverse ecological and meteorological characteristics, it is not too surprising to find Region 7 calling the season "kinder than usual." It is true that the rains came but winter held off—a fact to be very grateful for in the North Country.

It was gratifying to see the Horned Lark records from Region 1 identified as to subspecies. It is very useful to know when a local population leaves and a more northerly population arrives. Since the *species* has become the only "countable" form, too many birders are neglecting to gather this kind of information. Is it really true that no "Ipswich" Sparrows were reported in the state this fall? I would suspect that this is so, but I would also wager that a number were seen. It would be nice to know the age and sex of the rarer raptors and the color phases of Rough-legs and Screech Owls. Were there any blue morphs seen among the flocks of Snow Geese? Now that they have

been lumped we may never know. Observers and editors are urged to include this sort of detailed information.

It is absolutely impossible to derive any meaningful pattern in the departure and arrival dates in the following reports. There were both very early and very late dates in both categories. It is, of course, much easier to discern a late departure than an early one and the reports are sprinkled with many examples. Note, for example, the November Common Nighthawk, White-eyed Vireo, Blackburnian Warbler and Magnolia Warbler from Region 10. It is much more difficult to recognize the departure dates for species that just seem to slip away—when *did* I see that last Wood Thrush?

The season ended with a chilling foretaste of winter. Northern finches began arriving in good numbers but it was uncertain whether they would stay for long because of the rather poor cone crop. However, it was good to have siskins, redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks and White-winged Crossbills around again. Goldfinches and Purple Finches were present in good numbers and Evening Grosbeaks were wrecking the budgets of the local feeders. Northern Shrikes had appeared in good numbers by the end of the period and it seemed as though one might look forward to an interesting winter.

In the foregoings I know that I have slighted the movements of many of the common species such as Black-capped Chickadee and Red-breasted Nuthatch, both of which were reported in major migratory numbers. There were many excellent hawk counts reported, and the coast turned in the usual fascinating pelagic counts (note the kittiwake flight of Nov. 26 and the record late Manx Shearwater at the same time), but in the fall season this editor looks for the roster of wandering birds that have drifted from their normal areas to the east coast. It is certainly the most exciting time of the year for the active birder. This past fall there were a total of 59 species listed as rarities in the ten regions of the state. Of course, one birder's rarity is another's trash bird. The House Finch would not excite a Long Island resident and the Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee and Gray Jay are not particularly remarkable for residents of the Adirondacks. Each region has its own exciting birds, which are underlined in the various reports. A minimum of 22 species would cause excitement if they turned up anywhere in the state. At this time of the year the coast is particularly favored, for wandering birds tend to keep going until stopped by the great expanse of the ocean. However, each region had its own goody.

An Eared Grebe was seen in Regions 1 and 2. Region 1 also contributed the only Lesser Black-backed Gull. Region 2 came through with Varied Thrush, Bohemian Waxwing, Blue Grosbeak, and Harris' Sparrow. Region 3 contributed the Oregon race of the Dark-eyed Junco and a possible Brewer's Blackbird. Region 5, always a tough competitor, also had Bohemian Waxwings, a Yellow-headed Blackbird, and really hit the jackpot with a Long-tailed Jaeger (note also the 66 Parasitic Jaegers). Regions 6, 7, 8 and 9 had some marvelous birds with some new regional records but the bird of state wide interest was the Lark Bunting in Region 9.

As was mentioned earlier, the coast is in the best position to pick up fall stragglers and this year it outdid itself. The list of birds is mind-boggling. The details are in the report but just consider the following partial list: Brown Booby, White Ibis, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Skua (sp.?) Black Guillemot, Say's Phoebe, Mountain Bluebird, Wheat-ear, Varied Thrush, Bell's Vireo, Brewer's Blackbird and Boat-tailed Grackle. It almost seems unfair; we need a share-the-wealth program.

One species was left out of the above list for it has to receive the BOTS award. The Noddy Tern seen flying in from the ocean at Robert Moses State Park is the first sight record for this species and the late date is most remarkable.

By the time you read this it will have been winter for quite a long time. Have the winter finches stayed in the area? Have other northern birds come down? What have the feeders turned up? But most of all—can we survive until spring?

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REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

It was "water, water everywhere" for the fall season except for the nearly normal October—but even then it rained on half the days. Precipitation during a warm September was 5.7 in. (14.5 cm.) *above* normal, but November, with temperatures 3.5° F (1.9° C) warmer than usual, tied with the previous record high of 5.59 in. (14.2 cm.). The first killing frost in the Southern Tier came Oct. 11, a month late, and ponds were still mostly open at the end of the period.

Abundant foods were wild black cherries, which kept robins, flickers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks here later than usual, black birch seed, relished by smaller winter finches, and