

REGION 5 – ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

FRITZ SCHEIDER

Finally, a decent summer! After three long, cold, wet summers, central New York received some sunshine and warmth and the heliophilic anthropoids loved it. June and July were both warm and dry with splendid conditions for the locally breeding passerines, particularly swallows and Cedar Waxwings. The first half of August continued the pleasant weather although a few rainy days helped the local gardeners. Late August saw some chilly, days and cloudy cool weather in the last week pushed out many of the previously numerous swallows. The earlier dry weather helped to produce the best shorebird habitat conditions in three years.

Local farm practice changes are having a profound effect on the breeding species that are farmland dependent. The corn monoculture advancing inexorably thru the area supports only Canada Geese on migration and icterids during the summer. The continued abandonment of many farms, particularly dairy farms, sharply reduces the available habitat for the grassland sparrows and Horned Larks, and the loss of the outbuildings associated with dairy farming may eventually compromise the populations of Barn and Cliff Swallows utilizing them. On the plus side, some new and extensive bean crops and winter wheat plantings may produce respite, at least for the dirt-loving Vesper Sparrow. Another change in local habitat use comes from the extensive firewood cutting now being practiced in the wooded country of the Tug Hill Plateau and in the southern highlands. The roadside cuttings and the side roads developed for the removal of firewood have created superb conditions for breeding Winter Wrens and will subsequently provide the plant succession that will allow increases in the various brush-to-second-growth warblers (Nashville, Chestnut-sided, Mourning, and Hooded Warblers and American Redstart). Still another feature of habitat change noted this summer comes from the spread of the beaver into lower elevations, even into the Ontario lake plain creeks. The wooded margins of the various beaver ponds have been quickly populated by woodpeckers, Great Crested Flycatchers, and Tree Swallows after the second year of tree-kill by flooding.

Local seed and berry production seemed to be very heavy this summer and the local evergreen cone crop, especially spruce, can only be described as magnificent.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Breeding Bird Surveys were accomplished this season at Alder Creek (June 12), Cicero Center (June 4), Clinton (June 7), Kasoag (June 10), McKeever (June 15), North Victory (June 21), North Wilmurt (June 14), Old Forge (June 19), Oneida (June 18), Oriskany Falls (July 1), and Pulaski (June 1).

Positives for the summer include 1) expanding populations of Canada Geese; 2) good brood production of Mallard and Blue-winged Teal; 3) a hint of success in Red-shouldered Hawk nesting; 4) good variety, albeit poor numbers, in shorebirds; 5) some improvement in Common Nighthawk numbers; 6) good counts of

Eastern Kingbirds, Bobolinks, and Northern Orioles, primarily from the Ontario lake plain; 7) excellent tallies of some species of swallows in August; 8) a glut of waxwings; 9) increases in Warbling Vireos and Yellow and Chestnut-sided Warblers; and 10) further rapid expansion in House Finch.

Negatives for the season are 1) few white herons and very few Least Bitterns; 2) continued decline in Ring-necked Pheasant; 3) a paucity of rails; 4) further decline in Black Tern; 5) a sharp drop in breeding Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers; 6) marked reduction in both Eastern Phoebe and Least Flycatchers; 7) a drop in virtually all wren species, Hermit Thrushes, and in Golden-crowned Kinglets, all intracontinentally wintering species; 8) decreases in many of the locally breeding warblers, most moderate, but in a few severe; 9) further decline in the grassland sparrows and perhaps also in Field Sparrows.

Also note the plethora of very early fall migrants (*cf* shorebirds, Swainson's Thrush, warblers, and White-throated Sparrow).

Estival rarities include Little Blue Heron, Whimbrel, Wilson's and Northern Phalaropes, Forster's Tern, Lawrence's Warbler, and Painted Bunting, the last being a first for the region.

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Abbreviations: BBS—U.S. Fish and Wildlife Breeding Bird Surveys; HIGMA—Howlands Island Game Management Area near Port Byron; L—lake; Onon—Onondaga; SP—Sandy Pond; THP—Tug Hill Plateau, Oswego and Oneida Co. portions thereof.

LOONS—DUCKS: Pied-billed Grebe: breeding pairs at HIGMA, Utica Marsh, and Fair Haven Beach State Park; unreported from the major marshes (Scott Swamp, Clay Marsh) of the region. Great Egret: single birds at Rice Creek Aug. 14-23, N. Syracuse Aug. 14-15, and DeWitt Aug. 22; no other white herons reported. LITTLE BLUE HERON: adult Jun. 18 Rice Creek Biological Field Station (G. Maxwell), only the fourth adult reported for the Region. Least Bittern: reported only from the Utica Marsh and the marshes at the south end of Sandy Pond—like the Pied-billed Grebe, absent from the major marshes of the Region. Canada Goose: 200 plus at HIGMA Aug. 26; small populations (20+) have developed at Scott Swamp and at Pond Hundred near Fair Haven. Mallard: abundant production locally—118 Jul. 26 Onon L. Blue-winged Teal: like Mallard, good production this summer—82 Aug. 13 Pools Brook and Sylvan Beach. Wood Duck: many broods noted but brood size a bit low; counts of 20-35/day in late August. For the first time in years, no summering diving ducks for the entire Region—?hard weather, motor boats, no food? Migrant dabbling ducks showed up amazingly early—single Pintail Jul. 12, Gadwall Jul. 29, and American Wigeon Aug. 23, all at Onon L.

HAWKS—ALCIDS: Red-shouldered Hawk: one definite nesting with young in Oswego County and four sightings of other birds suggestive of possible nesting there—slightly encouraging. Marsh Hawk: adult male Aug. 13 at Mexico Point, a remarkably early date for a bird in that plumage. Ring-necked Pheasant: continues very scarce—max six Jun. 4 Cicero Center BBS. Virginia Rail: extraordinarily scarce thru entire summer—reported from DeWitt Marsh, Utica Marsh, and along L Ontario but the major marshes seemed devoid of them. Sora: like Virginia Rail, only worse. American Coot: again breeding at Utica Marsh (three pairs) this summer. Shorebirds arrived remarkably early but numbers were consistently low, this despite the best local shorebird conditions in the past three years. Fall arrivals,

many remarkably early, are Semipalmated Plover Jul. 9 one Onon L, Black-bellied Plover Jul. 1 two Onon L, Common Snipe Jul. 2 one Amboy Pool near Lakeland, Solitary Sandpiper Jul. 1 one Amboy Pool, Greater Yellowlegs Jul. 11 one Amboy Pool, Lesser Yellowlegs Jun. 20 two Amboy Pool, Pectoral Sandpiper Jul. 20 one Onon L, Least Sandpiper Jun. 23 one Onon L (record early), Dunlin Jul. 24 (amazing!) one Sylvan Beach, Short-billed Dowitcher Jul. 8 three SP, Semipalmated Sandpiper Jul. 12 two Sylvan Beach, and Sanderling Jul. 16 one SP. The better maxima included Black-bellied Plover 22 Aug. 6 SP, Lesser Yellowlegs 158 Aug. 3 DeWitt Marsh, Least Sandpiper 65 Aug. 27 Onon L, and Semipalmated Sandpiper 202 Jul. 30 Sylvan Beach. Particularly scarce were Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Sanderling. Rare shorebirds for the period include **WHIMBREL** two Aug. 17 Derby Hill, **WILSON'S PHALAROPE** four different individuals Onon L various dates Jul. 24 to Aug. 31, and **NORTHERN PHALAROPE** Aug. 27 two Onon L. Great Black-backed Gull: three to five birds persistent thru summer at SP Inlet—when and where will the first nesting be? Bonaparte's Gull: 14-46/day at SP Aug. 1-31, above average numbers for Aug. **FORSTER'S TERN**: two July 8 (early) SP Inlet with max. four there Aug. 31. Black Tern: continued decline—small colonies at SP, Deer Creek Marsh, and the estuary of the Salmon River; N. Syracuse marshes hosted a single pair this summer.

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: benefiting from the local farming practices—the corn monoculture sustains many birds thru the winter, the early June and July bean fields provide abundant feeding during the nesting season, and the young gather and thrive at the fields plowed and harrowed in preparation for the planting of winter wheat. Common Nighthawk: 12 pairs in Syracuse (R. E. Long), up slightly from the dismal numbers of last year; largest migrant group reported is 12 at Utica Aug. 11. Red-bellied Woodpecker: pair at Toad Harbor near West Monroe Jun. 10 is the first indication of eastward extension along the north shore of Oneida L. although the bird has nearly completely colonized the south shore already. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: down on virtually all BBS where it is regular—most dramatic drop on Old Forge BBS with 22 in 1977, only six in 1978; probably hard hit by two rough winters in a row.

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: Eastern Kingbird: up on eight of 11 BBS; in some cases numbers have doubled. Eastern Phoebe: lowest ever or missed on eight of 11 BBS—another victim of those two back-to-back rough winters. Least Flycatcher: down on ten of 11 BBS with the most impressive drops in the Alder Creek, Oneida, and N. Wilmurt BBS—perhaps a victim of the very cold spring just past. Swallows—most BBS show some diminution in breeding swallows, most marked in Tree and Bank Swallows on the Ontario lake plain and in Cliff Swallows in the western Adirondacks and the high country just west of that sector. However, local Aug. counts of some swallows suggested that production of young was very good and in some cases most have been outstanding, thus—1800 Tree Swallows Aug. 31 SP, 3500 Bank Swallows Aug. 13 SP, 20 Rough-winged Swallows Jul. 29 SP (this species is still in trouble), 30,000 Barn Swallows (a local record) Aug. 5 Clay Marsh, 12 Cliff Swallows (low) Aug. 27 Mexico and 75 Purple Martins (very low) Aug. 19 DH. Red-breasted Nuthatch: missed for the first time in eight years on the Old Forge BBS; very scarce in the THP also; first migrants Aug. 27 SP dunes. Winter Wren: still very low (one to ten/BBS) on the various Adirondack and THP tallies—another victim of the severe cold and deep snow of the last two winters; interesting are singing birds thru the summer at Camillus Valley and Pumpkin Hollow near Marcellus, both low elevation sites much favored by more southern species. Carolina Wren: virtually wiped out by the last two winters—only report is one in advanced molt Aug. 13 SP dunes. Long-billed Marsh Wren: severely reduced by the past two winters—max. six Scott Swamp Jul. 7 and six also Pools Brook near Kirkville Aug. 1; most observers saw none for the entire summer. Short-billed Marsh Wren: unreported for period. Mockingbird: singles on the Cicero Center and Oriskany Falls BBS; pair with four young in DeWitt; holding on a bit better than the Carolina Wren but not much. Gray Catbird and Brown Thrasher: BBS tallies for both up slightly or equal to last year's numbers, albeit last year's counts were somewhat reduced from previous years; one can say

they sustained no further decline and may be beginning to show evidence of minimal recovery. Hermit Thrush: down on five of six regularly tallied BBS; most striking is their absence from Old Forge, Oneida, and Pulaski BBS. Eastern Bluebird: still very low—none on any BBS; somewhat encouraging are 32 young fledged at Eaton; only three others reported. Swainson's Thrush: first migrant Jul. 29 (record early) one Colosse. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: max ten HIGMA Jul. 12, high for summer. Golden-crowned Kinglet: miserable tallies—max. only six/day from THP and missed entirely on the Old Forge BBS. Cedar Waxwing: everywhere!—three-45/BBS and Aug. counts often 100 plus birds/day; attracted in numbers to the abundantly fruiting Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and Elderberry (*Sambucus sp.*).

VIREOS—WARBLERS: Red-eyed Vireo: all time highs on Alder Creek and McKeever BBS; however, down slightly on the other nine tallies. Philadelphia Vireo: first fall arrival Jul. 30 one Little Sandy Creek (very early). Warbling Vireo: record numbers for Ontario lake plain tallies—16 Pulaski BBS, 18 Cicero Center BBS, eight North Victory BBS; however, down slightly on the counts from higher elevations. Breeding warblers as assessed by BBS—strongly increased species include Yellow and Chestnut-sided Warblers; moderately increased species Blackburnian and Canada Warblers; moderately decreased species include Black-and-white, Golden-winged, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped ("Myrtle"), and Mourning Warblers, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, and American Redstart; and strongly decreased species were Northern Parula and Black-throated Green Warblers. Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers seemed to have had a banner year in Oswego Co. with counts of 12-15 Golden-winged and three-four Blue-winged Warblers/day along L Ontario in early Aug.; also seven "Brewster's" Warblers reported in Aug. and a superb male "LAWRENCE'S" WARBLER Jun. 27-29 in southern Onondaga Co. Southbound migrant warblers arrived incredibly early this fall, *sic*—Tennessee Warbler Jul. 12 Pompey, Nashville Warbler Jul. 29 SP dunes, Northern Parula Aug. 6 SP dunes, Yellow Warbler Jul. 10 N. Syracuse, Magnolia Warbler Aug. 13 SP dunes, Yellow-rumped ("Myrtle") Warbler Aug. 19 SP dunes, Black-throated Green Warbler Jul. 29 SP dunes, Blackburnian Warbler Jul. 20 SP dunes, Chestnut-sided Warbler Jul. 29 SP dunes, Bay-breasted Warbler Jul. 29 Colosse, Ovenbird Aug. 6 SP dunes, Northern Waterthrush Jul. 16 SP dunes, Wilson's Warbler Aug. 19 SP dunes, Canada Warbler Aug. 6 SP dunes, and American Redstart Jul. 21 SP dunes. The list of early dates covers an impressive number of species (*cf* Swainson's Thrush and Philadelphia Vireo); whether this occurs every July and early August only future careful checking will determine.

WEAVERS—SPARROWS: Bobolink: all time highs on Alder Creek, Cicero Center, and Pulaski BBS but down in highland counts; fall flocks include 115 Aug. 6 Mexico and 150 Aug. 20 Oneida Hawk Lookout. Northern ("Baltimore") Oriole: up on six of ten BBS but in numbers only from the Ontario lake plain counts. Brown-headed Cowbird: numbers slightly down on seven of 11 BBS—Praise the Lord! Scarlet Tanager: tallies up on seven of 11 BBS; most encouraging is the recovery at Old Forge with just two in '76, nine in '77, and now 13 in '78. Cardinal: continues consolidation within its local range—more pairs noted on the north shore of Oneida L and in the L Ontario woodlots north to Sandy Pond. Rose-breasted Grosbeak: record tallies for Alder Creek, McKeever, North Victory, and Pulaski BBS with range of seven-21/BBS. **PAINTED BUNTING:** a female in mint condition netted, banded, and photographed Jun. 7 West Rd., Town of West Monroe, Oswego Co. (D. Emord) is a first regional record; photographs on file and details to NYSARC. House Finch: continues to expand—numbers in Syracuse impressive with 42 at a single feeder Aug. 15; spreading thru suburbia with breeding pairs now regular at North Syracuse and Camillus. Am. Goldfinch: numbers down somewhat on nine of 11 BBS; however, Aug. tallies suggest the species has rebounded superbly. Grassland sparrows continue to show ever lessening numbers; this reduction is probably a combination of lack of suitable breeding habitat locally, coupled with losses on the wintering grounds secondary to the past two harsh winters; totals for the period are Grasshopper Sparrow (14 individuals from seven sites), Henslow's Sparrow (11 individuals from six sites) and Vesper Sparrow (14 individuals from eight sites);

most observers saw none of the three species for the summer. Field Sparrow: down on six of the ten BBS where regularly present; count numbers range from one-eight/BBS; is this species joining the grassland sparrows in the pattern of declining numbers or is it showing only temporary losses because of the recent severe winters? White-throated Sparrow: expanding in southeastern Oneida and southwestern Herkimer Co. outside the previously recognized and mapped areas for the Region; numbers in the THP, however, appeared slightly decreased (only six-12/day) this summer; one Jul. 29 SP dunes is a very early fall migrant but is in keeping with the numerous early migrant warblers of that same date.

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The Editors note with regret that Fritz Scheider is stepping down as the Editor of Region Five, this being the last issue to contain one of his regional reports. His careful and good-natured analyses of local conditions have been among the best this journal has received, and should serve as a model for future contributors to these pages. —Eds.

REGION 6 — ST. LAWRENCE

LEE B. CHAMBERLAINE

Summer of 1978 is best characterized as hot and very dry. Some portions of the Region suffered extreme drought with streams drying up completely and Lake Ontario dropping to very low levels. Temperatures ranged from 98° F (36° C) to 45° F (7° C) with some days where temperature differences in twenty-four hours was only 25° F from a high of 96° F. Rainfall for June was normal, July below normal and August normal. August's rain all came in the last week of the month. Although the high temperatures made birding a bit uncomfortable, the numbers and varieties around this summer made most trips afield well worthwhile.

Highlights for the period included some unusual observations of some most unusual species. Many new records were set and proof of breeding species established, during the period. For starters a White Pelican showed up at Wilson Hill on Aug. 9—probably one of the Montezuma birds? The St. Lawrence River provided a Red-necked Grebe summer record and the Galloo Island Double-crested Cormorant colony zoomed to 192 active nests, possibly at the expense of the Black-crowned Night Heron colony. Great Blue Herons on Ironsides Island did well with a total of 280 active nests. Cattle Egret breeding in the Region was proven with nests, eggs and young at Galloo Island—it had been expected by some due to previous summer records in the Ellisburg area.

Waterfowl made a fair showing with some interesting observations. The Black Duck is being "absorbed" by the Mallard along the St. Lawrence River. Our second most common breeder along the St. Lawrence River is now the Gadwall—a totally unknown species just a few short years ago. Wood Duck production was way up, even with the very dry conditions. A pair of Ruddy Ducks at Wilson Hill all summer was frustrating when no young could be found. Accipiters and