

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

ROBERT ARBIB

It was a rather cool, wet spring. Those weather conditions that result in massive "waves" of birds, with warblers dripping from the trees, never materialized for most regions. To some it was a disappointing season, with relatively uneventful weather (with one or two exceptions) and yet, miraculously, when it was over every migrant species had come through—almost all of them on or close to schedule—and breeding was proceeding normally. Some of us wanted to shout "Hey! Go back and start again!" They will do that for us next year.

March began with snow cover over half the state, still deep in some areas, but a succession of mild days, with south to southwest winds, moved the snowline slowly northward. The wind shifted to northwest on March 15, followed by two days of light precipitation; on the 16th the temperature dropped 36° F. overnight, and the winds stayed north for the next week. A warm front on the 23rd changed everything and brought temperatures into the 70's the next day—the day the ice went out on Lake Ontario. From then on, southwest winds were the dominant factor until April 6. That day, with a massive low over Nova Scotia and strong northwest winds (to 63 mph in Syracuse) the state was treated to its final winter storm, with six to nine inches of snow upstate. The bad weather continued through April 10, and northwest winds continued to bring chilly weather through the 20th. Snow on the ground, except for the high peaks, was gone April 15.

From April 20 on there was a gradually warming trend, with westerly breezes until the 26th, when the winds turned southerly and brought rain. The ice on Upper St. Regis Lake went out April 27. May, as expected, continued the warming trend, and westerly and southerly winds predominated. The last snowfall at Paul Smiths was on May 6. May 9, 10, and 12 were unusually warm—to 90° in many areas, but soon a high moved east and then stalled over the ocean bringing cooler weather, the period ending in a cloudy, wet week with temperatures reaching only into the 60's.

Now let us pause for a moment and try to discern, from this weather picture only, which days might have been outstanding for the perception of bird migration. We must recognize at the outset that New York State is large, sprawling, and varied in terrain; state-

wide generalities are risky at best. Some fronts crawl across the state or near it, bringing fairly uniform conditions; others race through and a fall-out at Buffalo may completely miss Albany. We must remember too that what we perceive as "waves" may in reality be several different phenomena. One might be a precipitation of night migrants grounded by bad weather (a cold front, usually) *en route*, or it might be the natural endpoint of a normal night's migration. It might even result from a gradual build-up locally of migrants that have trickled in and are held up by local bad weather. And a paucity of birds where we are, may only mean that a massive flight overflowed us the previous night. There is a further trap for the analyst: is that apparent weekend wave a real one, or an overnight precipitation of birders?

Reviewing the weather summary for this season for New York State, one would predict, with the escape clauses suggested above, a good showing of early March arrivals, especially waterfowl, a slow-down or halt in mid-month, a resumption on the 23rd, an even better period from March 30 to April 5, a halt during the stormy April 6-10 period, a rather poor showing until April 23, excellent birding April 22 to 24 and 26 to 28, and a rather uneventful May, with best days May 8 thru 10 and 12, May 17 thru 19, and May 28 thru 30. And that is almost exactly how it happened.

Two regions, Susquehanna (4) and Hudson-Mohawk (8) had not reported at the time of this writing.

Events

The period was not without excitement. For those lucky enough to be in the right places (Braddock Bay and Derby Hill) at the right times, it was the best migration of raptors in modern memory; both lookouts were staffed daily and the Moons at Braddock Bay logged a record-breaking 31,218 individuals, including 18,729 Broad-wingeds, 4848 Sharp-shinneds, 2659 Red-taileds, five Peregrines, and a Swainson's Hawk. The best days were April 14, 25, and 26. At Derby Hill, less than 100 miles to the east, the best days were March 23 and April 26, with a spectacular Broad-winged flight of 8909 birds on the 28th. Gerald Smith and David Muir kept daily watch there, resulting in a grand total of 54,000+ individuals. Another Swainson's was found here too—not the same bird. A comparison of the two tables published with the reports of regions 2 and 5 would seem to indicate that the two lookouts are not entirely on the same flightline.

A not-so-edifying event happened near Newburgh in mid-March, when a farmer applied Parathion to his frozen fields, only to kill 5-10,000 assorted blackbirds, Starlings, robins, and a few pheasants. At first the farmer insisted that he had spread only fertilizer, but chemical analysis of the victims proved otherwise, and the unrepentant culprit was fined \$1200, a lesson we hope was noted statewide. Ed Treacy notes without details an immense blackbird flight there March 19, of a million plus birds overhead in a half hour's time. It would be instructive if we were told how such an estimate was made.

Finger Lakes (Region 3) reports an excellent waterfowl migration, with 50,000 Canada Geese at Montezuma N.W.R. in April, and 10,000 Snows there in March. It was even better on the Niagara Frontier, where a record 87,717 Canadas were at Iroquois N.W.R. April 10, while Region 2 reported 100,000 along the lakeshore on March 18. The shorebird flight was not sensational, but Region 2 had interesting finds and a late flight at El Dorado May 30 totaled 3225 birds, including a Long-billed Dowitcher and a Purple Sandpiper.

Finally, fine pelagic birding with skuas and other fancies, was reported for several offshore trips originating from Long Island, but alas, some of the birds seen were miles from New York State waters. It is time *The Kingbird* admits that Cox's Ledge belongs either to Rhode Island or Massachusetts, and that birds seen east or northeast of mid-channel between Block Island and Montauk Point must not be reported as Region 10 birds, nor should they enter New York State literature. The facetious argument that the bird is acceptable on state lists if the boat sailed from a New York port is just preposterous; by the same argument a one-day jaunt from Manhattan to Cape May could add birds to a New York State list. If the lister wants to keep a personal list of "Birds seen in New York State or on one-day trips originating therein" that is fine, but the out-of-state birds should not enter New York ornithology.

Lingerers

Winter lingers well into March in our state, and although this past winter brought no northern finches south, we did have some visitors that lingered. The last of the invading Great Gray Owls vanished from Lloyd Neck on March 29; the last of the few Snowy Owls lingered both in Buffalo and Region 5 until March 13, and the latest (only) Boreal Owl at Northrup Creek March 6. A (disabled?) Red-throated Loon was at Great Gull Island on a very late May 24, while a Boreal Chickadee astonished observers at Braddock Bay May 29. Bohemian

Waxwing tarried to April 3 at Ithaca, Varied Thrush at Mastic, L.I., through March 17, and the Rockland Lake California Gull made his curtain call March 11. A Northern Shrike was in Region 5 to April 12, and a Pine Grosbeak to March 10 in Amity township Region 1.

Earlybirds

One searches with some difficulty for notations of birds that returned on record early dates but this was simply not the year. There are many more comments that birds either arrived on time or were late: the small landbird migrants in many cases two to three weeks later than normal. However, a Ruff at Sagaponack March 7 thru 10 was early, as was a White-eyed Vireo April 8 at Hempstead Lake and a Black-throated Green Warbler at Ithaca April 10. Also a Great Crested Flycatcher at Point Breeze April 26, a Swainson's Thrush at Hemlock Lake April 20, and Common Tern at Great Gull Island April 21, the earliest ever!

Rarities

Each Regional Editor has conveniently listed his or her season's rarities, and since they defy analysis, and in the interest of saving space, we merely select here our top statewide birds, in order of splendor. At the very top, because it is a bird new to the state, is Staten Island's two (probably not a pair) Mississippi Kites, that frequented the locust-loud groves around LaTourette Park, May 26 to June 29. Second must be another kite—Swallow-tailed, which put in a brief appearance at Brookhaven, L.I., May 5. Tied for third were the two Swainson's Hawks, and fifth might be another Swainson's—this time Warbler—seen by many in Central Park. A remarkable five spring Baird's Sandpipers appeared, one each in Regions 2 and 6, and three in Region 9. Then comes the Cinnamon Teal at Elmira, the White Pelican at Montezuma, the two Sandhill Cranes in Region 2 and one in Region 5, Common Eider at El Dorado, and that California Gull, which would be tied for first if it hadn't been hooked on that junk food at Rockland Lake since the last season. Lastly, Region 5's first Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

Overshoots

Rarities of a lesser magnitude, because they represent East Coast residents that have ventured north of their recognized ranges (but might well be pioneers of a range expansion) included a remarkable number of Summer Tanagers, 24 of which were in Region 10, the aforementioned kites and Swainson's Warbler, Boat-tailed Grackles

at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge April 21, a Yellow-breasted Chat in Region 6, and scattered Blue Grosbeaks.

Absentees

The various regions report separately on species that seemed either scarcer than usual this spring, or were no-shows. A consensus would seem to be that Upland Sandpipers, *Empidonaces*, hummingbirds, Horned Larks, kinglets, chats, Purple Finches, Palm Warblers, Chestnut-sided Warblers, Vesper Sparrows, and Fox Sparrows, and all the thrushes, particularly Gray-cheeked, belong in this category. Most of these judgments are subjective, others reflect real and verifiable population declines. One of the major functions of the season reports is to monitor the rise and fall of species' numbers. The birds you don't see may be more newsworthy than the ones you see.

Odds and End

Dutchess County's only Great Blue heronry disappeared this year—bad news. A pair of Gull-billed Terns returned to near its pioneering nesting grounds at Cedar Beach. An exceptional movement of Gannets along Long Island's south shore was observed on March 24, with several hundred birds/hour counted. Fish Crows nested near Ithaca.

The highlights summary is just that, a summary. There is no way that every meaningful record listed on the pages that follow can be noted here. The reports themselves are a mine of information, albeit tough digging, but worth the mining, refining, and hammering into that precious metal: knowledge.

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

In this gentle season of lovely scents, sights and sounds, this special time of fresh beginnings and delightful anticipation, it is pure poverty and a monstrous shame to be wall-bound from Nature's joyous offerings. Admittedly, there were times when four walls and a roof were welcome this spring, even though it was more dry than usual and about ten days ahead of normal. Tree foliage developed early, but the low precipitation held back grasses and shallow-rooted shrubs, encouraging low nesting. During March, which was 3.7° F. (2.1° C.) warmer than usual, a high pressure system brought a good overflight of geese and swans the weekend of the 11th, and by the end of the month, small lakes and ponds were ice-free for the good numbers of April waterfowl. April temperatures were