

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

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Vivian Pitzrick, Editor of Region One, remarks that many birders retire their binoculars and miss one of the most exciting times of year, the nesting season. As one who has usually been active in the field during this time, I can agree that it is most interesting and stimulating. This summer was also marked by observers noting an early return of migrant shorebirds in late June and some pronounced movements of warblers and other passerines commencing in July and early August. It really is a rewarding season for those who go afield.

Although there were expected variations statewide, June was generally dry with only light rainfall and some below-normal temperatures. July was on the dry and hot side, while August turned cool with variable, sometimes heavy rainfall and several cold fronts that triggered migration. Region One's breeding bird survey routes indicated that numbers of birds were holding up well. Wood Ducks, Ruffed Grouse and Turkeys had successful breeding seasons, Tree Swallows, Cliff Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds showed increases in the region, and Yellow-rumped Warblers were found in a new locality. Nineteen pairs of Eastern Phoebes with 12 pairs double-brooded, produced at least 81 fledglings with only eight nest failures in Allegany County, reports the editor. She also tells of a Gray Catbird building a nest in late July with a Song Sparrow taking over, adding materials and fledging four young in late August!

Genesee region's annual breeding bird count in the Hemlock-Conesus Lake CBC circle showed very little change in numbers of species or individuals from last year. Among their more noteworthy findings was a confirmed nesting of Acadian Flycatchers, probable breeding of White-eyed Vireos and numerous reports of Orchard Orioles in Orleans County. A dramatic increase in gull numbers of three species on the west lakeshore was noted in late June (40,000 Ring-billed Gulls!), but the reason for this is not apparent to me. Ring-billed Gulls were also observed gleaning waste cherries on the wing from picked orchards in Region Two. Their Eared Grebe remained for two weeks with local ducks in late July and early August and the season's total of raptors at Braddock's Bay Hawk Lookout reached 34,846 with the addition of 3,628 birds in June, the bulk being immature Broad-winged Hawks.

Television towers continue their destruction of nocturnal migrants. In Region Three on August 27-28 more than 100 birds of 14 species hit a tower, involving mostly warblers but including five Yellow-bellied Flycatchers. High water-levels at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge excluded most shorebirds, though a Ruff appeared in early July. Four young Bald Eagles were raised successfully at towers on the refuge and birds fledged in previous years have been seen flying in the area. Noteworthy summer nests in the region were of Alder Flycatcher, Fish Crow and Hooded Warbler; a pair of White-eyed Vireos was carrying food and a pair of Kentucky Warblers was found with a fledgling nearby.

No report was received from Region Four up to time of writing.

Shorebird migrant habitat is perennially changeable. The editor for Region Five commented on the dry spell creating mud flats for them, the absence of immatures, and increasing human disturbance of such areas. There were impressive numbers of early migrating vireos, warblers and flycatchers in the region. Wilson's Phalaropes totaled 12 for the period and four light-phase Parasitic Jaegers were seen at Derby Hill August 25. Seven regions reported Bald Eagles, St. Lawrence reporting four as well as excellent shorebird records and a rare Loggerhead Shrike nest.

Adirondack-Champlain region workers banded 56 Black-crowned Night Herons on Four Brothers Islands. Three pairs of Cattle Egrets with eggs or young were there, as well as two Snowy Egrets with no evidence of breeding. July 18 was a very early start for the first fall migrants in Region Eight, including some recently fledged Swainson's Thrushes. The editor notes widespread repopulation of Turkeys and the spreading practice of early June mowing of hayfields likely contributing to the decline of grassland sparrows. Both species of cuckoos were reported to be more numerous than usual in Regions Eight, Nine and Ten.

Of interest was the wandering Black Vulture reported at Bashakill in Region Nine on June 10. Despite high water levels, there was a good appearance of shorebirds, including first county records of Marbled Godwit and American Avocet. A bluebird nest box project had considerable success with triple broods in three boxes and two pairs raising 12 young each. Hackensack Swamp unfortunately received millions of gallons of raw sewage from a ruptured line and two Prothonotary Warblers which might have bred there disappeared after that.

Region Ten reported relatively poor Osprey nesting success on Gardiner's Island owing to chick mortality from heavy rains in May, although Plum Island birds were more successful. Six hundred Least Tern chicks were banded at Eaton's Neck, the largest known breeding colony on the eastern seaboard. The Long Island breeding bird surveys yielded Chuck-will's-widow, three Acadian Flycatchers, four Brown Creepers, Kentucky and Hooded Warblers; Rusty Blackbird, two Summer Tanagers and Blue Grosbeak were also of interest on these surveys. A pair of Prothonotary Warblers bred successfully in Nissequogue. Region Ten's rarities included four Magnificent Frigatebirds on June 30 and August 11, 21 & 28 in various localities, two White-faced Ibises at Jamaica Bay, 11 Fulvous Whistling-Ducks on the south shore, one Swallow-tailed Kite June 12 at Great Neck, the previously reported two Mississippi Kites last seen June 9 on Staten Island, two Sandwich Terns August 9 at Mecox and subsequently, and Boat-tailed Grackles probably nesting on Pearsall's Hassock.

The editor of Region Ten correctly warns that year-to-year gains or losses should not be over-interpreted as they may only be short-term phenomena in a relatively stable environment. Also of interest are the reports on a colonial bird survey of the marsh islands of Hempstead Bay, and Cox's Ledge pelagic trips (Yellow-nosed Albatross August 21), though the latter is now officially not in New York, and, as the previous Highlights editor commented, should not be included in reports.

Some of the rarer species reported in addition to those mentioned earlier are Yellow-crowned Night Heron in Region Two, White Pelican in Region Three, Saw-whet Owl in Region Two, Worm-eating Warbler in Region Two, Yellow-throated Warbler in Region Nine, Western Meadowlark and Yellow-headed Blackbird in Region Two.

A wealth of information is incorporated into these regional reports by hard-working editors, and one can only select from many items of interest or significance. Indeed, the summer season provides a fascinating combination of breeding, migrant and vagrant bird reports that make it at least the equal of any other season for stimulation and knowledge.