

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

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For the last two years, this department has been written by various guest editors from different parts of the state. Just about the time this issue was being readied, John Farrand and I made the painful discovery that neither of us had invited anyone to write the "Highlights." That meant that one of us would have to do it. We argued mightily. I lost.

After brooding about it for awhile, I decided to use my editorial prerogative and do these "Highlights" a bit differently. I believe that most people read the "Highlights," their own region in detail, and perhaps, the introductions to other regions in the state. This time, other than finding specific reference to a couple of spectacular records, later in this report the reader will have to work his way through each region to find out what happened in the state this spring. The time spent will be well worth it, and a complete perusal of the state's regions should become a quarterly habit.

Most birders are aware of an official list of "Endangered" species, compiled by the U.S. Dept. of the Interior, and including such birds as the California Condor, Whooping Crane, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon. The publicity surrounding these "Endangered" species has certainly made its impression upon anyone even faintly interested in nature and conservation. However, there is another list that cries out for attention, and that is the "Blue List" compiled by Robert Arbib of *American Birds*. The species appearing on that list are those whose populations seem to be declining and which therefore should be monitored. If you wish to find out exactly how and why each of these species was placed on this list, I refer you to *American Birds*, Vol. 33, No. 6, p. 830-835.

For the purpose of this "Highlights," I will attempt a correlation of the New York spring season with the "Blue List" of 1980, skipping of course those species on the list that are extralimital. As you read on, you may be surprised at some of the birds listed, but please keep in mind that the list is compiled on a national and not a state basis.

Common Loon—Three regions in our state normally see enough migrants to permit an evaluation. Region 1 refers to a poor flight, Region 2 a fair flight, and Region 10 omits any reference to the species at all. Region 7, where the species has historically been a com-

mon breeder, suggests that human intrusion is taking its toll.

Red-necked Grebe—Region 1 and Region 2 advise that the spring flight was “good,” and “excellent,” respectively.

Double-crested Cormorant—Region 5 uses the adjective “moderate,” Region 6 says “increasing,” Region 8 says “regular,” and numbers were good in Region 10.

Great Blue Heron—Regions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 specifically point out increases. However, the other five regions do not list a single record. It is hoped that this is a case of observers simply not reporting its presence and I suggest that the regional editors might in the future make specific requests on this and other species.

Black-crowned Night Heron—Only Region 3 makes a positive statement. There is no mention in Region 10. Presumably this is simply because observers were more interested in warblers.

Least Bittern—It is hard to get a reading on such a secretive bird. Seven regions did not record the species. The total number of sightings in the state is six individuals.

American Bittern—Region 5 reports the species “still in low numbers,” Region 8 notes “many reported,” while Region 9 says “unusually scarce.”

Black Duck—Region 3’s Montezuma high figure of 900 is not very impressive. Region 5 simply states, “all ducks in low numbers,” and Region 6 says, “still decreasing.” This hard-to-miss species is not even listed in five of our regions.

Canvasback—This handsome diving duck is of course a winter visitor and not a spring migrant. Again, Montezuma numbers are not high. The zero listing in Region 6 is deemed “unusual.”

Turkey Vulture—Arbib points out that only in the Northeast is this bird showing no evidence of a decline. This is borne out by the remarks in each region of New York State, with increasing numbers in all regions. It is even mentioned on Long Island in Region 10, where it is indeed an unusual sight.

Sharp-shinned Hawk—The encouraging trend of recent spectacular fall flights is reflected in high spring counts.

Cooper’s Hawk—Another encouraging spring of good numbers.

Red-shouldered Hawk—The picture is mixed, with a “doing well” in Region 1, a “decrease” in Region 2, “resident birds scarce” in Region 7, five reports in Region 8, and a few more reports than usual in Region 9.

Marsh Hawk—Seems to be holding steady throughout the state. Region 10 of course is the fall stronghold for this species, but even so it is surprising that not one bird was recorded in Region 10 this spring.

Osprey—A pair nesting in Montezuma represents the first known nesting in Central New York. Region 10, of course, is the important nesting area in New York, and in that region the recovery of the Osprey continues apace. Perhaps this bird may soon come off the "Blue List."

American Kestrel—Derby Hill had fairly good numbers this spring and Region 6 commented favorably. However, there were seven regions that did not list the bird at all. In view of its inclusion on the "Blue List," I would hope that in future seasons, the editors will prod their observers for reports on this species.

Merlin—It is hard to get a reading on a species that is so rare a spring migrant and does not breed in the state. Only Region 9 makes any comment, other than listing a number, and the comment is, "more reports than ever." I wonder how many were American Kestrels?

Bobwhite—For decades this bird has been rare in New York State. This spring's reports point out just how rare, even discounting the higher elevations where it has never occurred. Only Region 4 and Region 9 report the species, and the grand total is only two.

King Rail—Never a bird readily observed, it is mentioned only in Region 3. Certainly its declining habitat plays a part.

Piping Plover—This plaintive voiced March migrant is really not expected anywhere but Region 10. One did show up in Region 3, but nowhere in the Region 10 summary will you find the name listed. Let us hope that this reflects the season's concentration on "dickey" birds, and not the true picture.

Common Tern—Region 2 says "scarce," Region 4 reports two birds, Region 5 gives only an arrival date, and Region 8 says "a few." Let's look at Region 10, because that's where they all are, but nary a one is reported. Hopefully, the breeding season report will give us better information and correct this oversight.

Roseate Tern—Only Region 10 would be involved here, and again we come up with nothing. I am sure this is merely a lack of input that will be corrected in the next issue.

Least Tern—Not a single bird of this species was reported this spring in the entire state.

Black Tern—Region 2 states, “numbers seem good in marsh breeding areas,” Region 5 comments that the bird was seen in normal numbers, Region 1 just gives a number (13), and Region 8 mentions “a few.”

Yellow-billed Cuckoo—Of course this has always been absent at higher elevations, but one would think that this caterpillar killer would be having an excellent spring in the rest of the state. Only Region 4 and Region 9 comment on excellent numbers.

Barn Owl—Specifically, one bird in Region 2 and two birds in Region 8, with Region 9 stating “normal.” What is “normal”?

Long-eared Owl—This is an exact repeat of the previous species, which means that both of these species went unreported in seven of our ten regions.

Short-eared Owl—Due to its diurnal habits, this should be a little easier to get a reading on, but the results are not much better, with only four regions in the state reporting.

Whip-poor-will—Reported in seven of the state’s ten regions, but only in very small numbers.

Common Nighthawk—Region 2 says, “dismally low,” Region 4 reports four, Region 5 says “scarce,” Region 6 says “one only,” while Region 8 and Region 9 give us hope with “numerous reports” and “good spring flight” respectively.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird—This one is frightening. Region 4 reports one, Region 5 says, “scarce,” Region 6 lists two, and Region 9 says, “very few,” and that is it for the state.

Red-headed Woodpecker—Region 5 should provide the bulk of the reports, but only had eight sightings. Region 1 had a dozen records, and there is a smattering of other records throughout the rest of the state.

Hairy Woodpecker—Region 1 comes up with an encouraging “lots of . . .,” and Region 6 says, “some improvement,” but several other regions don’t record the bird at all.

Eastern Phoebe—It is heartening to read, “numbers up” in Region 1, “seemingly completely recovered” in Region 4, “more than last year” in Region 6, and “up in numbers” in Region 9. How are we to interpret the lack of any mention in Regions 2, 3, 8 and 10?

Willow Flycatcher—This species, of course, represents a special identification problem, but based on where the bird should occur in New York State, Region 1, 2, 3, 8 and 10 say nothing. Region 5 gives only an arrival date, and Region 9 says, “up in numbers.”

Least Flycatcher—Sit up and take notice—Region 4 gives us the number 48, Region 5 uses the adjective “widespread,” and Region 6 alludes to one bird. The rest of the state—a blank.

Purple Martin—Always absent at higher elevation, only Region 3 says anything encouraging. Region 10 is most gloomy on this one.

Eastern Bluebird—Region 1, “doing beautifully,” Region 2 for some reason is silent, Region 3 comments favorably, Region 4, “encouraging numbers,” Region 5 and Region 7 are negative, Region 8 positive and Region 9 says, “good nestings,” but reports heavy losses due to blowflies.

Winter Wren—Region 1 reports that the count is up. No other region gives us such hope.

Carolina Wren—Region 9 advises that the species seems to be coming back strong. No other region makes any other comments, but of course the bird never did occur at higher elevations or in the northern part of the state.

Golden-crowned Kinglet—Regions 1, 2, and 3 report glowingly on the bird. Region 7, which should be a plus, makes no mention.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet—Identical to the above, except of course that this mite is not expected in Region 7.

Loggerhead Shrike—A few scattered reports throughout the state. Most birders have been made aware of the recent scarcity of this species in New York State, and are no doubt on the lookout for it.

Warbling Vireo—Region 1 lists the first nesting for the region, region 4 says, “more than usual,” Region 6 says, “very abundant,” Region 7, “well-represented” and Region 9 “numbers up.” That’s encouraging.

Yellow Warbler—Surprised this is on the list? Well don’t be, as you won’t find it listed in fully seven out of the state’s ten regions.

Yellow-breasted Chat—Never very widely distributed in the state, this report only mentions about a half-dozen birds.

Eastern Meadowlark—Another one you might question? Don’t, because it is missing from eight of the ten regions.

Grasshopper Sparrow—Never very numerous in the state except on Long Island, it is distressing that it receives no mention in Region 10. There are scattered reports from Regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9.

Henslow’s Sparrow—Hardly ever reported away from its breeding grounds and a localized breeder at that, only Region 2 reports “good count,” with four other regions reporting too.

Vesper Sparrow—Six regions mention this species. The most dis-

turbing comment is from Region 1 which gives the figure 25 and points out that last year's count was 226. Region 3 uses the words, "very low," and Region 6 the adjective, "poor."

I am sure that I am going to get protests from various people who will point out that many of the birds on this "Blue List" are species that eager spring birders just don't pay any attention to, in their quest for the unusual and the rare. That may be correct, but I would suggest that the regional editors make an effort to have their observers report on all of the avifauna, as this is one of the purposes of *The Kingbird*, to get as true an overall picture as is possible.

Speaking of the "unusual and rare," mention must be made of the White-fronted Geese in Regions 1, 2, and 5, the Barrow's Goldeneyes in Regions 1, 6 and 9, Swainson's Hawks in Regions 2 and 5, a Gyrfalcon in Region 5, a Spruce Grouse in Region 6, LeConte's Sparrow in Region 3, and White-faced Ibis, White Ibis and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Region 10.

Going one step further from the "unusual and rare" to the hair-raising, take a look at Region 2 and you will find New York State's first records for the Ferruginous Hawk and for Hutton's Vireo. I write this very matter-of-factly but I assure you this is not the way I reacted when I first read the report. Both of these records have been submitted to NYSARC, as well as several other records from Region 2 and from other regions as well. NYSARC action on 1980 records will be reported in *The Kingbird* in 1981. As pointed out in Vol. 28, No. 2, p. 75 of *The Kingbird*, the publication of a record in the Regional Reports does not imply that NYSARC has approved the record, or even that the record has been submitted to NYSARC. Records appearing in the Regional Reports have been approved by a regional editor. It is hoped that certain records will be submitted to NYSARC, but this is entirely up to the observer.

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