

REGION 5 – ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

PAUL A. DeBENEDICTIS

A very mild Winter was followed by a cool, damp early Spring, and generally fine weather in May—a combination not entirely conducive to good birding. March and early April were a seemingly endless succession of rainy weekends, as often as not followed by flight days during the early mid-week. Oh, such frustrating weather! A long spell of northerly winds during late April and early May left the Lake Ontario littoral devoid of bird concentrations, but mild temperatures during this period encouraged the awakening of buds. Once again the leaves arrived before the insectivorous birds did, and this was another Spring for hunting warblers amid the foliage. The middle two weeks of May were a succession of good flight days; the worst flight day was 17 May, the date of the Rational Big Run! One easily got the impression that most of the migration was compressed into this short period, although most of the earlier arriving species had appeared on their nesting grounds before then. May ended in a week of the most delightful weather. Migrant birds, finding no reason to stop, passed over us and the usual late rushes of shorebirds, Tennessee Warblers, and Blackpolls did not occur.

Derby Hill once again received nearly continual coverage by Gerald A. Smith, and surprised everyone by producing between 55,000 and 56,000 raptors even though birds were seldom concentrated along the shore of Lake Ontario by southerly winds. April 26 produced the highest ever single day hawk total for Derby Hill—about 19,000 birds—on west northwest winds! Most hawks passed one to three miles inland, and would have been missed had not Smith spent most of the Springs observing from the “south lookout.” However, Smith comments that Sharp-shinned Hawks and Ospreys (in particular) appear to hold to the shore even in unfavorable winds, and may have been undercounted relative to the other species for this reason.

Establishment of a salmon fishery on Lake Ontario has impacted local water-bird populations in two ways. First, Alewife populations no longer build to the levels that caused kills to carpet Lake Ontario's beaches with dead fish each Spring. Numbers of fish-eating birds appear to have declined in proportion to the lower numbers of Alewife, and now are consistently lower than were reported a decade ago. The second impact is indirect. As soon as the rivers and bays feeding Lake Ontario are free of ice, an armada of small fishing boats cross the lake, particularly from Mexico Bay east, where most waterfowl concentrations traditionally occurred. Waterfowl do not tolerate this degree of disturbance, and vanish with the fleet's arrival. The mild winter only accelerated the inevitable conflict, and virtually no waterfowl concentrations were seen on Lake Ontario after late March. However, all observers agree that even at inland sites the waterfowl flight was exceptionally poor, probably even more so than can be explained by the generally open conditions that prevailed everywhere this Spring.

“Southern” herons were little in evidence, and no good sites for shorebirds were found this season. Sapsuckers, Winter and Carolina Wrens, Red-breasted

Nuthatches, and Hermit Thrushes remained scarce, but most observers felt that the two kinglets continue to improve in numbers; daily maxima for both species were about 30 birds this Spring. Impressive numbers of warblers came only from Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse, 19-22 May. "Winter finches," as expected, were almost nonexistent. Grassland sparrows of all species were slow in arriving and low in numbers; no large concentrations of the other sparrows were found.

In spite of a lackluster flight, a surprising number of rarities were detected. The most outstanding of these include: White-fronted Goose, Swainson's Hawk, Gyrfalcon, Sandhill Crane, Stilt Sandpiper, Ruff, Great Gray Owl, Worm-eating and Kentucky Warblers, and Western Meadowlark. A total of 231 species (plus 2 additional forms) were reported.

Abbreviations: arr—arrival; DH—Derby Hill; LOL—Lake Ontario littoral; LSB—Little Sodus Bay and vicinity; max—maximum; mob—multiple observers; NYSARC—details to N.Y. State Avian Records Committee; SP—Sandy Pond and vicinity; StMC—St. Mary's Cemetery, DeWitt; Syr—Syracuse, *—photographed by.

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LOONS—DUCKS: Com. Loon: arr 3 Apr., max two on 20 Apr., both DH. Red-throated Loon: last 28 Mar., LOL, probably overwintering birds. Red-necked Grebe: only one reported. Double-crested Cormorant: 38 reported LOL 26 Apr. to 20 May. Green Heron: arr DH 6 May. Cattle Egret: singles DH 10 Apr. and 17 May. Least Bittern: only two reports SP after 22 May. Am. Bittern: still in very low numbers. Black-crowned Night Heron: singles 24 Apr. (Butterfly Swamp) and 20 May (SP) only—very scarce. Whistling Swan: two ad. Port Byron, one imm. LSB on 23 Mar. only reports. Canada Goose: omnipresent, max 8,000 DH 26 Apr. Brant: total about 650, most DH, 17 to 26 May, max 600 on 17 May. **WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE:** ad. Woodman's Pond, Madison Co., 19 Apr. (JL); the description suggests *flavirostris*. All ducks in low numbers, the only rarity a King Eider, LOL 16 Mar. (FGS).

HAWKS—ALCIDS: The commoner DH raptors are tabulated below.

Species	Summary of Derby Hill Raptor Census			
	Arrived	Maximum/Date	Last	Total
Turkey Vulture	10 Mar.	213/7 Apr.	17 May*	948
Goshawk	6 Mar.	5/28 Mar.	2 May	35
Sharp-shinned	10 Mar.	1,133/8 Apr.	11 May*	7,994
Cooper's	10 Mar.	58/28 Mar.	3 May	618
Red-tailed	20 Feb.	1,418/20 Mar.	26 Apr.*	7,809
Red-shouldered	10 Mar.	357/20 Mar.	8 Apr.*	1,208
Broad-winged	8 Apr.	14,301/26 Apr.	31 May*	34,047
Rough-legged	20 Feb.	27/8 Apr.	3 May	247
Golden Eagle	19 Mar.	5/28 Mar.	3 May	18
Bald Eagle	6 Mar.	5/20 Mar.	31 May*	12
Marsh Hawk	10 Mar.	85/8 Apr.	11 May*	518
Osprey	4 Apr.	42/26 Apr.	30 May*	275
Merlin	1 Apr.	2/30 Apr.	11 May	12
Am. Kestrel	10 Mar.	91/8 Apr.	2 May*	420

*—still passing on 31 May, 90% by date listed.

SWAINSON'S HAWK: light phase ad. 24 May (FGS—NYSARC), third DH record, GYR-

FALCON: "white phase," 19 Mar. (GS, T. Carrolan), 2nd DH record. Peregrine: single DH 11 May was only report! **SANDHILL CRANE:** ad. DH 26 Apr. (mob, *DWC, NYSARC). Black-bellied Plover: only 14 birds in two reports on 18 May. Ruddy Turnstone: only report SP 18 May. Upland and Spotted Sandpipers: both arr DH 20 Apr. Greater Yellowlegs: arr. Onondaga L. 10 Apr. (late), last LSB 19 May. Lesser Yellowlegs: arr. 19 LOL Apr. (very late), last LSB 19 May. Red Knot, White-rumped Sandpiper and Sanderling went unreported. Pectoral Sandpiper: seasonal total of seven (!) 29 Mar-20 May—amazingly low! Short-billed Dowitcher: only .10 reported 11 to 29 May. **STILT SANDPIPER:** two near Rome 10 May (SG)—first local Spring record; the brief description suggests partial breeding plumage and is hard to attribute to any other species. Ruff: female Port Byron 29 Mar. (FGS, mob). Glaucous and Iceland Gulls: last LOL 16 Mar. (early), Bonaparte's Gull: only seven reported 13 Apr.-17 May, low. Com. Tern: arr. 19 Apr. DH. Caspian Tern: arr. 24 Apr., one to two day in late May, all DH. Black Tern: arr. 10 May DH, only one to four day thereafter.

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: **GREAT GRAY OWL:** Rt. 3 one mi. s. DH 10 Apr. (mob, banded Ed Hinkle, *DWC, NYSARC); later struck by car but recovered and sent to J. and M. Forness, who reported it to have been quite emaciated. It might well have not survived were it more cognizant of traffic! Whip-poor-will: arr. Pleasant Lake, Oswego Co., 10 May. Com. Nighthawk: arr. Syr. 15 May, scarce thereafter. Chimney Swift: arr. 20 Apr. DH. Ruby-throated Hummingbird: arr. 11 May DH, scarce. Red-headed Woodpecker: only eight reports after 11 May. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: migrants 12 Mar. to 6 May, only one report of more than 2/day.

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: Eastern Kingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher: both arr 6 May, the first DH, the latter StMC. Eastern Phoebe: arr. DH 20 Mar., one to six day thereafter. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: singles LOL 18 and 29 May, very scarce. Willow Flycatcher: arr. DH 16 May. Alder Flycatcher: arr. DH 21 May. Least Flycatcher: arr 5 May, widespread but a week late. Eastern Wood Pewee: arr DH 16 May. Olive-sided Flycatcher: only two reported, the first 24 May. Swallows generally in low numbers as migrants, arrival dates (all DH except first) are: Tree—19 Mar. (LSB), Bank—8 Apr., Rough-winged—6 Apr., Barn—9 Apr., Cliff—12 Apr., Purple Martin—4 Apr. Com. Crow: DH total ca. 40,400, max 18,550 on 10 Mar. Black-capped Chickadee: 10-15/day at DH in late Apr. Red-breasted Nuthatch: total of six reported 20 Apr. to 18 May. House Wren: arr. DH 26 Apr. Winter Wren: migrants 30 Mar. to 20 May, max five LOL on 20 Apr. Carolina Wren: only report a single StMC in Mar. (REL). Long-billed Marsh Wren: arr. Scott Swamp 10 May, numbers slightly improved over last year. Gray Catbird: arr. Eaton 6 Apr. Brown Thrasher: arr. LOL 20 Apr. Am. Robin: max 5,500 DH on 4 Apr. Wood Thrush: arr. StMC 5 May. Hermit Thrush: migrants 19 Apr. (late) to 15 May, max only 4. Swainson's Thrush: arr StMC 5 May. Gray-cheeked Thrush: arr. StMC 15 May. Veery: arr StMC 5 May. Eastern Bluebird: DH totals only 15, low. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: arr. DH 20 Apr. Water Pipit: max 32 near Rome (SG) on 11 May. No. Shrike: last 23 Mar. at LSB. Loggerhead Shrike: *ONLY* report DH on 10 Apr. (FGS).

VIREOS—WARBLERS: Few impressive maxima for these groups. Arrival dates of the early species were generally late, while the later arriving species tended to appear more nearly on schedule, and all migrants very scarce after about 22 May, a week earlier than usual. **WORM-EATING WARBLER:** single Labrador Pond 5 May (DWC, KC). Only one hybrid Blue-winged X Golden-winged Warbler reported. Tennessee Warbler: arr. Pompey 5 May, early. No. Parula: commoner than usual (10-12/day in early May) SyrMourning Warbler: arr. StMC 17 May, scarce as migrants. **KENTUCKY WARBLER:** single StMC 12-24 May (REL, mob). Yellow-breasted Chat: single Camillus after 15 May only report. Hooded Warbler: arr. 17 May, continued local increase evidenced by max. of six near Fair Haven on 26 May.

WEAVERS—SPARROWS: Bobolink: arr. DH 5 May. **WESTERN MEADOWLARK:** 26 May LSB (FGS), first since 1976. Red-winged Blackbird: arr. Clay Marsh 9 Mar., max

1,000,000 DH on 20 Mar. Northern Oriole: arr DH 9 Mar. Orchard Oriole: two pairs returned to Minoa 15 May (*fide* KC). Rusty Blackbird: last 17 May. Com. Grackle: arr. Syr. 9 Mar., max. 50,000 DH on 20 Mar. Brown-headed Cowbird: arr. Syr. 14 Mar. Scarlet Tanager: arr. DH 11 May. Rose-breasted Grosbeak: arr. StMC 6 May. Indigo Bunting: arr. Camillus 15 May. Evening Grosbeak: scarce, last 24 May. Purple Finch: arr. 10 Apr., max 40 LOL 11 May. House Finch: record max 120 Syr. early Mar., outliers from Eaton, Holland Patent, Oswego, Pompey, and Rome. Pine Siskin: single StMC (Onon. Aud. Soc.) late Apr. only report. Red Crossbill: two Big Moose on 1 Mar. (MS) and two Labrador on 24 Apr. (DWC) only reports. Rufous-sided Towhee: arr. DH 20 Mar., low numbers all Spring. Grasshopper Sparrow: only report 22 May, late and low! Henslow's Sparrow: only report 18 May, likewise. Tree Sparrow: last LOL 29 Apr., early. Chipping Sparrow: arr. DH 20 Apr. Field Sparrow: arr. DH 10 Apr. White-crowned Sparrow: arr. Syr. 6 May, last LOL 20 May, scarce. White-throated Sparrow: migrants *ca.* 15 Apr. to 20 May, no concentrations. Lincoln's Sparrow: migrants LOL 10-24 May. Swamp Sparrow: arr. Scott Swamp 10 Apr. Lapland Longspur: three reported, last DH 1 Apr. Snow Bunting: last DH 1 Apr.

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REGION 6 — ST. LAWRENCE

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Spring 1980 tended to be similar to the winter, that is, it was hard pressed to determine what it was going to do from day to day. Temperature extremes were -30° F to the mid-80's. On March 14th a total of seven inches of snow fell in the Watertown area. April was a cool month and a fairly wet one, while May was cool and dry with lake levels in Lake Ontario dropping through the period.

Trends for the period which were very evident were: Improvement in Sharpshinned Hawk but Cooper's still low; Bald Eagles still improving; Marsh Hawk showing a vast improvement; Black Terns seemed to be holding their own on selected large wetlands; Mourning Doves are building to pre-winter 77-78 numbers; Short-eared Owls seem to be popping up all over the Lake plain; Common Nighthawks continue in trouble; Red-bellied Woodpeckers continue to tease the local birders; Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were down from their normal numbers; Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers continue to come back; Eastern Phoebe's are building back; Red-breasted Nuthatches continued scarce; Loggerhead Shrikes improved near Watertown—but none were seen in Massena; Warblers and sparrows moved through and never bothered stopping.

Increased coverage of the St. Lawrence River by VanRiet indicated migration along the river in a magnitude not suspected except by a few.

Rarities for the period included Cattle Egret; Barrow's Goldeneye, Spruce Grouse, Black-headed Gull, Tufted Titmouse, and Louisiana Waterthrush.

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LOONS—DUCKS: Com. Loon: one Wilson Hill Apr. 21 to May 17; two Perch River