

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

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New York State, with an area of some 49,576 square miles, extends over about eight degrees of latitude and four and a half degrees of longitude, and ranges in elevation from sea level to 5,344 feet at the summit of Mt. Marcy in Essex County. Alone among the northeastern states, it contains large areas of no less than three of Merriam's life zones, the Canadian, the Transition, and the Upper Austral or Carolinian. With such a vast and varied area to consider, it is difficult to draw generalizations from the wealth of information gathered in these regional reports. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the following pages reveals certain broad trends, which can be helpful in interpreting details and placing them in some sort of perspective.

Although the regional editors had differing evaluations of the weather during June, July, and August, there seems to be general agreement that June was unusually cool, July was wet, and both July and August were hotter than normal in many areas. By the end of the summer the state was in the throes of a drought, the worst since the four-year drought of the mid-Sixties, although the effects of this drought were less evident in Region Ten than elsewhere. The cold weather early in the summer caused heavy nestling mortality among swallows, most notably in Regions One, Two, Three, and Four, where Tree Swallows were particularly hard hit. Various regions reported or theorized that other insectivorous birds, and especially flycatchers, were adversely affected as well. There seemed to be no impression that the drought had any discernible effect on nesting success.

The reports contain useful information on a number of species that are currently undergoing changes in their status as breeding birds in New York State, and some of the more noteworthy cases will be mentioned here. Common Loons continued to decline in Region Six. Turkey Vultures are expanding their range on the Ontario Lake plain, also in Region Six. Ospreys continue to increase on Long Island, and nested successfully in Region Three, while a hacking program at the Seneca Indian Reservation in Cattaraugus County produced a single successful fledging. There were conflicting reports on the success of the accipiters, but Red-shouldered Hawks were noted to be on the increase in Region Three. Turkeys are increasing in Regions One and Five, and are holding their own in Region Ten.

Ring-billed Gulls had an excellent year at their colonies in eastern Lake Ontario (Regions Five and Six). Gull-billed Terns nested again on Long Island, where Common Terns had a "normal" year and Black Skimmers a poor one. Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos received little comment in most regions, but numbers were up in Regions Nine and Ten, no doubt because this year saw the largest outbreak of gypsy moths since 1971; there are indications that a similar outbreak may occur next year. Common Nighthawks were up in Regions One and Two, and down or not noted in other regions. Chimney Swifts were still declining in Regions One, Six, and Seven. A decrease in Eastern Phoebe was reported from Regions One and Five, with increases in Regions Three and Six. Continuing their expansion into New York on two fronts, Acadian Flycatchers nested in Regions One and Two in the west, while a singing male was found in Region Three, and the species was noted in several places in Regions Nine and Ten. It was a bad year for swallows generally, as noted above, and Vivian Pitzrick reported a "disastrous" season for Tree Swallows in Region One. Red-breasted Nuthatches were on the upswing in Region One and bred in Region Ten, where Brown Creepers also bred. Regions One, Three and Nine turned in encouraging reports for the Eastern Bluebird, despite early nesting failures, but this species was said to be "barely hanging on" on Long Island, where it has been scarce and in decline for decades. Prairie Warblers, always a sporadic breeder away from Long Island and the Hudson Valley, bred in Region One, were found singing in Regions Two and Three, and were reported on single dates in Region Four. The grass-inhabiting sparrows continue to do poorly in the face of habitat destruction and natural plant succession, with the Vesper Sparrow as usual being the species causing the greatest concern.

There were notable numbers of Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Herons and Yellow-crowned Night Herons in the western part of the state, and both a Glossy Ibis and a White Ibis turned up in Region Two. Two White-faced Ibises spent the summer at Jamaica Bay in Region Ten. Franklin's Gulls were reported in Regions Two, Three, and Five. Three pairs of Fish Crows were seen all summer at Ithaca, in Region Three, and about a dozen were present for several months at Vestal, in Region Four; perhaps this species may begin breeding in inland areas, as it does in the Mississippi Valley.

The timing of the fall migration was near normal, with southbound shorebirds appearing by the end of June, and peaking in numbers in

the latter part of August. The effect of the summer's drought on shorebirds varied in different parts of the state. In some areas, mud-flats and ponds dried out quickly, presenting the birds with hard-caked mud that provided no food; observers found a reasonable variety of species but low numbers of individuals. But in other areas, the falling water levels produced good habitat, and excellent shorebirding was reported. The drought seemed to have little effect on the migration of other species.

This season saw the first field work in connection with the Breeding Bird Atlas Project. Although the cool weather in June may have reduced bird song and caused some birds to be overlooked in certain areas, as pointed out by Robert Spahn, even this first year has brought some surprises and produced interesting additions to our knowledge of breeding distributions in the state; the reader is referred especially to the comments of Paul DeBenedictis in Region Five. Barbara Spencer, in Region Ten, notes that this one year's efforts have shown where productive work can be done next year. All of this serves to whet our appetite. Several regional editors commented on the fact that the cool weather early in the season caused many birders to hang up their binoculars once the spring migration had subsided, thereby missing out on what is in some ways the most exciting season of the year, when careful notes and well-coordinated team work can pay rich dividends. This writer urges everyone to come out next year and join in this highly worthwhile and exciting undertaking.