

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

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While there are the expected similarities, this season's regional reports reflect again the diversity to be expected from a state of this size with the range of elevations and variety of habitats present. There was nearly complete agreement that September was warm followed by October and November colder than normal. Most areas were dry, though Regions 2 and 6 were much wetter than normal, mainly due to a few heavy rains. The first substantial snowfall occurred in mid-November across the state. Where noted, wild food was abundant, except that the cone crop was poor and Regions 5 and 7 termed the overall food picture mixed and poor, respectively. The weather patterns of this fall were not conducive to frequent groundings or to major low flights, though nearly all regions noted good days, particularly in early October. Indicators of these patterns are the virtual absence of tower kills at the closely monitored sites in Elmira on the one extreme and the outstanding migrant grounding precipitated by a cold front in Region 5 on October 6, at the other.

Fall is a season of "flights," the southward passage of particular species or groups awaited with anticipation and often carefully monitored annually by birders in the various regions. These showed considerable contrast this year. Loons and grebes were considered low or poor in nearly all regions; at best "fair" in Regions 6 and 7. Waterfowl provided more contrast. Geese were low in Regions 1, 2, 7 and 8, moderate in 3, and termed good in the remaining regions. Brant were nearly absent from Regions 2 and 5 where flights are normally seen along Lake Ontario. Ducks generally followed a very similar pattern with numbers much better as you move eastward and southward across the state. The major fall hawk flight is traditionally coastal and along adjacent mountain ridges. This flight is well covered in the reports of Regions 9 and 10. Encouraging numbers are noted for several species, including the smaller accipiters, Red-tailed Hawk, and Marsh Hawk. Statewide, note 21 Bald Eagles and 67 Peregrine Falcons, both decreases from last year, but the latter still encouraging. Red-shouldered Hawk remains very low with only Regions 4, 7 and 9 providing any respite from pessimism. Shorebirding suffered from lack of habitat along Lake Ontario, but saw much increased, drought-exposed habitat downstate. Of the regularly occurring shore-

bird species, 35 were recorded this fall. Only Piping Plover and Willet were unmentioned. Each region had its noteworthy sightings. Gulls, too, were well-represented; the "white-winged" species were low, Laughing Gull appeared in four regions, Franklin's in three, Little Gull in six, and Black-legged Kittiwake in four. Incredibly, Sabine's Gull was observed in three inland regions with single immatures in Regions 5 and 7 and two adults in Region 2. Among the passerines, major widespread movements noted were: Black-capped Chickadee—abundant in most regions with only timing variable—late September and October everywhere except November in Region 2; American Robin—high numbers in all regions where noted; winter finches—all recorded except Hoary Redpoll, but numbers and variety variable across regions; Pine Siskin—a massive movement through October in Region 10; White-crowned Sparrow—high in Regions 2, 8, 9 and 10; and White-throated Sparrow—abundant in Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7. Finally, spread across families of birds, the picture of northern "invaders" is again variable: Rough-legged Hawk was low in Regions 1, 4 and 9, moderate in 3, 6, 8 and 10, and high in 2, 5, and 7; Snowy Owl appeared in small numbers in Regions 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8 and fair numbers in Region 10; Bohemian Waxwings visited Regions 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7; and Northern Shrike was absent from Regions 3, 4 and 10 and present in only small numbers elsewhere.

In addition to the major flights receiving specific annual attention, any period of migration provides an abundance of interesting observations and this fall was no exception. Consider early arrivals and late departures with their attendant speculations concerning indications of winter weather. All regions had at least a few local early or late dates. When weighed against historical records on a statewide basis, the number shrinks to manageable proportions and the late outweigh the early by a wide margin. On this scale, only Palm Warbler, Sept. 6 in Region 7 remains to represent "early." New late dates for the state included: Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Nov. 2 in Region 10; Olive-sided Flycatcher, Oct. 15 in Region 5 and Oct. 24 in Region 1; and Swainson's Thrush, Nov. 2 in Region 2. Other very late departures were: Cattle Egret, Region 4; Semipalmated Sandpiper, Region 10; Northern Phalarope, Region 2; juvenal Hermit Thrush, banded in Region 8; White-eyed Vireo, banded in Region 3; Philadelphia Vireo, Region 2; Tennessee Warbler, Regions 2, 9 and 10; Yellow Warbler, Region 4; Blackburnian Warbler, Region 5; Northern Waterthrush,

Region 1; Yellow-breasted Chat, Region 5; Hooded Warbler, Region 2; American Redstart, Regions 2 and 10; and Indigo Bunting, Region 8. The warbler dates are particularly interesting in that their migration as a whole was termed poor to spotty.

Additional observations buried among the regional reports should satisfy almost any taste or interest. For the Blue List trackers, there are notes of some kind for nearly all of those species found in New York. Double-crested Cormorant, Winter Wren, Eastern Bluebird, and both kinglets showed much improvement. Red-necked Grebe, American Bittern, Common Tern, Loggerhead Shrike, and Vesper Sparrow were down. Least Bittern, King Rail, Piping Plover, Roseate Tern, and Least Tern were unreported. The rest received variable reports or too few comments for any conclusions to be drawn. For the wader watchers, there was an increase in white herons with Snowy Egret in Regions 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10; Cattle Egret in 3, 4, 6 and 9; and Great Egret in 2, 3, 9 and 10. The closet rail watchers, and apparently that describes most since there are never many reports, should find tears coming to their eyes as they picture that lonely immature Virginia Rail marching up Madison Avenue during rush hour. Notes of this type at all levels of seriousness are in almost endless supply.

Beyond the annual flights and all of the interesting observations, fall is the season of vagrant rarities. While it may be argued that most of these sightings are of little or no lasting ornithological value, their possibility certainly does add spice to fall birding. As usual, by virtue of geography, the coast, particularly Long Island, remains the premier area for finding rarities. However, don't overlook the rest of the state; each region has its goodies. Remember that those western rarities must fly over or around the rest of the state to reach the coast and under proper conditions may put down almost anywhere briefly before rushing off to their appointed spots on Long Island. The cream of this fall's crop were: Region 1—Yellow Rail and Varied Thrush; Region 2—Eared Grebe, Gannet, Sabine's Gull, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, lingering Common Raven, and Boat-tailed Grackle; Region 3—Fish Crow; Region 4—Varied Thrush; Region 5—Laughing Gull and Sabine's Gull; Region 7—Sabine's Gull and Harris' Sparrow; Region 9—Little Blue Heron, White Ibis, California Gull, Western Kingbird, Dickcissel, and Black Vulture; and Region 10—White-faced Ibis, White-fronted Goose, American Avocet, Western Kingbird, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Brewer's Blackbird, and Boat-tailed

Grackle. Identifiable subspecies noted in the regional reports were: "Oregon" Junco in Regions 2, 3 and 4; and "Ipswich" Sparrow and "Gambel's" Sparrow in Region 10.

Leaping out from among all these records as BOTS is Region 7's Rufous Hummingbird, a state first, present from September 3 through 13.

For the scorekeepers, at least 312 species were recorded across the state during this fall season.

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REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

"To bird or not to bird?" – now that's the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to sit and watch a feeder, refuse to burn expensive gas and by opposing, end one part of runaway inflation, or to go in spite of that and search the roadside haunts. Of course, some already know the joys of birding on foot with the added bonus of better health. In view of the abundance of wild foods, perhaps the low numbers and many omissions in reports are more a reflection of limited driving than of actual status of birds. However, some flights, as noted below, were definitely poor while others were splendid.

The drought of summer continued through fall with precipitation an inch (2.5 cm.) below normal. Although September was unusually warm, 29° F. (1.6° C.) above normal, October and November were very cold with temperatures of each 2.7° F. (1.5° C.) below average. For these last two months, the jet stream was far south of its normal path, pulling arctic cold into our region. Particularly in the Southern Tier, woods and fields were so quiet, it was as though a giant hand had come through in late October, sweeping bird life before it.

Fall positives include 1) good numbers of the Great Blue Heron, 2) Turkey Vultures and Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks doing O.K., 3) grouse, and Turkeys thriving, 4) widespread reports of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird to October 6, 5) excellent numbers of the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Hairy Woodpecker, 6) strong flights of the Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatch, 7) a few more Winter and Carolina Wrens, 8) many robins and Eastern Bluebirds, 9) a superb kinglet recovery and hordes of Cedar Waxwings, 10) a splendid Rusty Blackbird flight, 11) regular appearance of small Cardinal numbers, 12) continued large Purple Finch population in the Southern Tier to November 13, House Finches about to "inherit the Earth"