

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

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Across the state, the general descriptions of this season are as uniform as any which I have seen. In virtually all regions, the weather averaged warmer and drier than normal, but with a number of strategically placed and spaced cold snaps, such as the April ones which seriously damaged the fruit crop. Very warm temperatures in the beginning of the season led to many early arrival dates for normally early migrants, but had little impact on later arrivals. The early warmth also led to advanced foliage in all areas except parts of Region 1, where the cold struck at just the right time to severely retard foliage, particularly in the Southern Tier. In Region 9, the advanced foliage was stripped later by the massive Gypsy Moth invasion.

The general summaries of the migration nearly all mention scarcity, particularly of passerine migrants. Several note that species counts were excellent in spite of the thin numbers of individuals. Bill Cook of Region 8 states directly the lingering possibility skirted by most: "This could be a frightening harbinger of 'silent springs' or perhaps, hopefully, the migrants passed by unnoticed." It is interesting that virtually all references to scarcity are to feelings or to numbers "appearing" or "seeming" low, or to lack of sightings in very local areas rather than to statistical data. Perhaps the really frightening point is that with no historical statistical distributions for comparison, we cannot really recognize the first "silent spring" until it is very silent indeed.

Enough morbid speculation! As Paul DeBenedictis notes: "The weather can probably be blamed for most of this." The historical data apparently doesn't exist, models to weight weather and other extraneous variable effects are a long way off for migration, so leave the hard analysis to the breeding bird surveys. Spring is a time to roam free after winter's strictures. Wander through the regional reports and note the goodies turned up and the results of the Big Days or Century Runs and the hawk watches.

Scanning through the general notes and commentary we find: most waterfowl poor or through quickly; hawk counts down a bit; shorebird habitat poor, but variety interesting; a May drawdown of a reservoir in Region 8 netting only "at least ten species of shorebirds"; hordes of fishermen impacting the Lake Ontario waterfowl picture; banding effort reports in Regions 1, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10; a

Gypsy Moth preview in Region 8; and an interesting sexual separation of only one day in migration of warblers in Region 10. Among the more specific positives and negatives of broad occurrence of special interest we have: a poor loon flight; very low numbers of Horned and Pied-billed Grebes; increases in Double-crested Cormorant; lower Cattle and Great Egret numbers; American Bittern dismal; a large Whistling Swan flight upstate; no Surf Scoters; few Goshawks; Osprey nesting at Montezuma again; slight improvements for Ring-necked Pheasant; Turkey increases reported in seven regions; a huge Pectoral Sandpiper flight upstate; Great Black-backed Gull nesting on Little Galloo Island; excellent tern variety on Long Island; few Caspian Terns; cuckoos up with the Gypsy Moths, down elsewhere; Screech Owl poor; Chuck-will's-widow increasing in Region 10; Common Nighthawk decreases spreading; Eastern Phoebe mixed, but lows predominant; Common Raven appearing in six regions; Fish Crow increasing inland; Winter Wren very low; thrushes generally very poor; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at unexpected locations in the northern higher elevations; kinglets up, Ruby-crowned the better; Loggerhead Shrike still poor, but a few more; Red-eyed Vireo low; Warbling Vireo abundant; warblers generally scarce overall with few waves; Eastern Meadowlark in trouble in several regions; and excellent return flights of several finches, particularly Pine Siskin.

Moving on to the rarities, we find the bulk just overshoots or strays from populations breeding relatively close to the south or west of New York State. This is in strong contrast to the heavy western flavor of last spring's rarities. The *crème de la crème* includes: Region 1: Purple Sandpiper, "Lawrence's" Warbler, Painted Bunting, and "Gambel's" White-crowned Sparrow; Region 2: Louisiana Heron, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Thayer's Gull, Roseate Tern, Brewer's Blackbird, and Summer Tanager; Region 3: Lesser Black-backed Gull, Varied Thrush, Lark Sparrow, and Harris' Sparrow; Region 4: Glossy Ibis; Region 5: White-fronted Goose, King Rail, and Summer Tanager; Region 6: Black-headed Gull, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; Region 7: Barrow's Goldeneye and Wilson's Phalarope; Region 8: the Eurasian race of the Green-winged Teal, Black Vulture, Fish Crow, and Connecticut Warbler; Region 9: Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Prothonotary, Kentucky, and Orange-crowned Warblers, and Brewer's Blackbird; and Region 10: White-faced Ibis, Swallow-tailed Kite, Black-necked Stilt, Arctic Tern, Sandwich Tern, Swainson's Warbler, and Townsend's Warbler.

For the record, a total of 316 species was reported with several

additional morphs and hybrids. Probably another ten to fifteen would be added using a complete listing from Region 10. There were 49 species recorded only from one region with Regions 10 and 2 leading with 23 and 9, respectively, though all reporting regions had at least one unique species.

The BOTS award this season is very difficult to assign. No bird really stands head and shoulders above the rest. Several would have been automatics a few years ago, but have become "regular." My final vote must fall to Brewer's Blackbird, due to sheer weight of numbers, with 23 in Region 2 and 2 in Region 9, regional first records in both cases.

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REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

Beautiful, beautiful spring, a season of promise, this year was one with little to complain about except for the continued drought, only partially relieved in February. With this season's precipitation steadily averaging 1.5 inches (3.8 cm) below normal, the consistent lack of rain made birding more pleasant but didn't help the water table. The migration, so strong in February, halted abruptly as March came in cold and miserable. Although March temperatures averaged 1.8° F. (1° C.) below normal, the warm final week cleared ponds of ice and brought good flights of early water birds, swans, geese and blackbirds. April's weather was storybook stuff with temperatures 3.9° F. (2.2° C.) above normal, and many species arrived early. May, too, averaged warmer than normal by 1.4° F. (.8° C) but the cool, dry first two weeks retarded foliage, particularly in the Southern Tier, causing birds to hide their nests as best they could on the ground or under sod, or occasionally in an unaccustomed conifer. Although much of the May migration was thin and scraggly, with some areas very poor for warblers except for "Butter-butts" (D. Clark's Yellow-rumps), there was a good representation of species. (Weather Data: Wellsville and WIVB-TV Buffalo.)

Spring positives include 1) Great Blue Herons doing well and an enormous Whistling Swan flight, 2) an excellent migration of Sharp-shinned Hawks, good reports of the Red-shouldered Hawk and Bald Eagle, and a slight improvement in American Kestrel numbers, 3) many grouse and turkeys, 4) a lively shorebird flight and a big flight of Bonaparte's Gulls, 5) lots and lots of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, 6) fair numbers of Tufted Titmice and a good Red-breasted Nuthatch flight, 7) catbirds "insanely abundant" (Jones), a great robin and Veery flight, and bluebirds doing well with one pair a record-breaker, 8) good numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a few more Golden-crowns, 9) many Cedar Waxwings, 10) incredible numbers of Purple Finches and American Goldfinches,