

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

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The diversity of birding in our state again asserted itself this spring. The general descriptions run from a "best ever" describing April in Region 1 to a "worst ever" related to May in Region 9. The overall consensus seems to have been that this was a poor or disappointing migration. The regional variants from this were an eventful average in Region 5 and a good and rather early flow of migrants in Region 7. Looking closely at the reports you will see that the "poor" generally follows from substantial periods of bad weather in April and a May which produced few groundings of the passerines most of us so eagerly await in the spring.

Concentrating a bit more on the weather effects, we see in March a general warm spell from the 11th to the 14th which apparently was a prime factor in causing excellent waterfowl concentrations, bringing many birds in when the ice-free bodies of water were limited. Associated with this period you will find several first county waterfowl records from Region 9 and several very early arrival dates for Region 10, including Glossy Ibis, Semipalmated Plover, and Pine Warbler. Another warm spell brought a new state early date for Whip-poor-will, 25 March in Region 4. Early April brought another event in common, blizzard-like snow hitting all but Regions 6 and 7 in the 6 to 8 April period. Recovery from this varied widely as did reports of effects. Generally, it was sufficiently early so that few species were adversely affected. Tree Swallow and E. Bluebird seem to be the species most definitely and hardest hit, with cases of heavy mortality observed. Am. Woodcock and E. Phoebe were suspected of severe damage, but such effects were not obvious later. In Regions 8 and 9, heavy highway kills were noted as birds of many species foraged along roads while the countryside was blanketed. Late April actually saw many very early arrivals with new state early dates recorded for Least Flycatcher on 17 April in Region 9, and 25 April for Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in Region 3 and for Gray-cheeked Thrush and Blackpoll Warbler in Region 10. May brought the flat weather lamented by so many. The first half was sunny and warm, the latter half cold and wet over most of the state with only Region 6 reporting the reverse. The lack of frontal passages resulted in few groundings and the persistent warmth and sunshine in direct overflights by many migrants.

In researching alternative ways to proceed from here with high-

lighting, I considered an update of the Blue List review appearing in the 1980 Highlights for this season. Early preparation for this led to a substantial trauma with the revelation of a great crash in our House Sparrow population, not currently "bluelisted" but obviously soon to be so, as it now is noted in *only one region!* Additional review showed Downy Woodpecker and Starling in similar straits. More seriously, in two of these cases we can only wish it were so, and in all of our reading and analysis of the regional reports we should keep in mind that they too are *highlights* for the regions, and that birds always abundant, never really absent, consistently flagged over many years past, or absent from lack of reports, and not particularly of interest to the regional editor, may all appear as simply missing.

Proceeding conventionally in a relatively general vein, there were only two potentially wide-ranging environmental impact issues noted specifically this season. The first, affecting Regions 1, 2, 5, and 6, is the revival of the Lake Ontario sport fishery with highest intensity usage now coinciding with the historical peak feeding and resting periods for loons and some diving ducks. It remains to be seen whether this will really impact populations or just change this specific migration stop. So far it certainly has reduced reports of concentrations along this lakeshore in mid-April. The second issue is a more positive report from Region 9 that this spring the forests, with the exceptions of white pine and hemlock, have recovered well following last year's massive Gypsy Moth defoliation. This may provide some consolation to all the rest of us who must certainly see this scourge in our futures, probably periodically into the indefinite future.

Continuing with a broad brush, we next examine some of the major spring flights awaited in various parts of the state. Loons, usually viewed along the coast and the Great Lakes, were nowhere recorded in good numbers; Red-throated Loon being particularly scarce. The grebe picture was similar, except that Region 2 again recorded another large gathering of Red-necked Grebes, echoed by a new regional high for this species in Region 5. Waterfowl provided the brightest picture with five regions calling the early flight "good" to "best since 1976" and only one "poor." The hawk flight was very good at the two major hawk watches reporting (see tables in Region 5 and 6) and elsewhere was termed up in Region 6 and low in Regions 1 and 9. At the Braddock Bay hawk watch, no less than eight species were tallied at record highs for the recent six years when daily counts have been compiled. Shorebirding was probably typical. There were few really high counts and inland there were the usual habitat woes, but

all expected species were reported with good variety present in most regions. Tern comments were generally negative with the exceptions of Regions 6 and 10, though Caspian Tern was recorded in all of the more easterly regions where it is usually rarer. The thrush picture was mixed, with good reports from the breeding regions again suggesting that some of the negatives may simply represent cases of lack of groundings. Among the vireos and warblers one also finds a wide variety of perceptions. The overall picture, however, was one of scarcity and as these are among the most eagerly awaited of our spring migrants, this perception certainly darkened the impression of the whole migration for many observers. From the summation of regional views, we might track more closely Yellow-throated Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, and Ovenbird. There were no icterids meriting special attention, though you will find expressions of concern for E. Meadowlark in Regions 1, 5, and 9 and for Scarlet Tanager in Region 9. The winter finches remaining and returning provided noteworthy records from nearly every region. Sparrows again received mixed reviews, with most of the grassland species of most concern; Savannah finally arriving on the negative list in Region 1, Grasshopper and Henslow's unchanged to down further everywhere, and only Vesper up slightly in Regions 3, 4, and 7. The rest of the sparrow tallies and comments appear to fall within normal bounds.

Moving on to a finer focus, there are some species whose situation deserves more detailed consideration or whose regional commentary is of particular interest. Cattle Egret provides something of a mystery. Ten years ago it was increasing and even breeding in scattered locations across the state. This year it was recorded in only seven regions, with only singles or twos in six of these. By way of contrast, Snowy Egret reached a new high in Region 5. After last spring's highs in more easterly areas, Whistling Swans returned to their normal flight path with peak numbers in Region 1. Note the signs of recovery for Brant in Region 9 and the continued increase of Snow Goose at Montezuma NWR. Ring-billed Gull is booming both in numbers of nests in the breeding colonies and as huge flocks of apparent non-breeders in fields in Region 2. Both cuckoos are up where Gypsy Moths are or were last year and are lower elsewhere. Barn Owl is apparently in very poor shape with only two reports, one found dead in Region 8. In Region 2, Great Horned Owl lost many nests to high winds, while in Region 9 they took over a small Yellow-crowned Night Heron nesting colony. The Common Nighthawk's mysterious decline is still evident almost everywhere west of Region 9.

Blue Jay and Common Crow stage spectacular annual flights along the south shore of Lake Ontario. Once again, documentation is minimal, with counts from only Derby Hill in Region 5. This comment holds true for many of the passerines with detailed counts being made only occasionally at Braddock Bay or Derby Hill. Given the major irruption of Boreal Chickadee last fall, the return flight was eagerly awaited. However, only three were recorded, one each in Regions 1, 2, and 9, outside of their normal haunts in Region 7. E. Bluebird continues to improve slowly. Nestbox trails are accounting for a substantial part of this increase. Loggerhead Shrike is a rarity, recorded only in five regions in small numbers. White-eyed Vireo, long considered a rarity over much of the state, accumulated to 17+ reports, also from five regions. The Blue-winged/Golden-winged Warbler complex provides an interesting study, with a Golden-winged decrease as Blue-winged increases and the numbers of hybrid reports increasing. Reports of "Lawrence's" Warbler from six regions is most indicative of the amount of hybridization occurring. Connecticut Warbler has long been considered a great rarity in the spring. This season it is reported from five regions. One might at least suspect that some of its apparent rarity lies in its reclusive habits in dense habitat, with migration dates often very late, after foliage is well out, and many of our eager observers have slacked off from their early season pace. This year four of the five observation dates lie between 23 and 31 May. The fifth, on 16 May, a female, might be reevaluated as a male in the light of two banding reports in Region 8, where apparent MacGillivray's Warblers netted were found to be Mourning Warblers holding over their split eyerings into their first spring. With Brewer's Blackbird there was more evidence that we may see a new breeding bird added to the state list soon, as a bird was sighted in Region 1 and up to 24 returned to the same area in Region 2 where they visited last spring, this year arriving earlier and departing later. The fantastic numbers of Com. Redpoll saw banding of 1190 in Region 5 and 796 in Region 8. Along with these were at least 27 Hoary Redpoll reports accepted, with 12 of these, seven of them banded, in Region 5.

In addition to those groups and species which my particular set of interests and biases has led me to highlight in some detail, there are data buried in the regional reports to appeal to almost any interest. There is a waterfowl table in Region 3, long a feature and a guidepost to inland waterfowl numbers. There are Big Day/Century Run reports in Regions 3, 8, and 9 and special spring censuses in Region 1. Banding reports appear for Regions 1, 5, 8, and 10. In addition to early ar-

rivals noted above, there were three very late dates: Pine Grosbeak in Region 7, Lapland Longspur in Region 2, and Snow Bunting in Regions 2 and 6. There are several first or second regional and county records and a number of regional high counts. Breeding records of special note include: Com. Merganser in Regions 1 (in an unused chimney) and 8, the Bald Eagle nests still active in Regions 2 and 6, record early Yellow-rumped Warbler eggs in Region 1, Louisiana Waterthrush in Region 6, firsts for Red-tailed Hawk, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Pine Siskin on Staten Island, and a first for Red Crossbill on Long Island. There are additional species continuing in widespread decline: Black-crowned Night Heron, Least Bittern, Black Duck, Red-shouldered Hawk, Bobwhite, Whip-poor-will, and Short-billed Marsh Wren. Some more species are showing at least tentative signs of recovery: Marsh Hawk, Osprey, Ring-necked Pheasant, Least Flycatcher, and the kinglets. Others flagged for closer watching are: Screech Owl, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, House Wren, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Still others continue long term increases previously reported: Turkey Vulture, Com. Raven, inland Fish Crow, and House Finch. Finally, there are a number of special comments tucked away in the editorial commentary, such as: a change in Canada Goose feeding strategy in Region 3, the punctual return of Chimney Swifts in Region 8, a case of interspecific grooming in Region 7, grackles killing and eating finches in Region 9, and House Finches moving from towns and suburbs to the general field in Region 9. These are just a sampling, there is much more for you to dig out.

Following all these attempts at serious analysis, we come to the lighter fare, though actually the carrot which leads many afield, the rarity list. As usual, many of those flagged in the regional reports are of only local scarcity or of habitual inclusion. Some are being recorded with sufficient frequency that one must wonder at their continued status as special-note rarities, *e.g.*: Great Egret, Snowy Egret, European Wigeon, Whimbrel, Wilson's Phalarope, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Prairie Warbler, and Kentucky Warbler. The regional bests include: 1) Barnacle Goose, No. Phalarope, Black-legged Kittiwake, and Brewer's Blackbird; 2) Stilt Sandpiper, Red Phalarope, No. Phalarope, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Brewer's Blackbird, and Sharp-tailed Sparrow; 3) Curlew Sandpiper, White-fronted Goose, Barrow's Goldeneye, Laughing Gull, Arctic Tern, Com. Raven, and Yellow-headed Blackbird; 4) Fish Crow and Yellow-headed Blackbird; 5) Thayer's Gull, White-eyed Vireo, Worm-eating Warbler, and Connecticut Warbler; 6) Hawk-Owl and Bohemian Waxwing; 7) Glos-

sy Ibis and Gyrfalcon; 8) Prothonotary Warbler; 9) Common Eider, King Eider, Louisiana Heron, and Chuck-will's-widow; and 10) Swallow-tailed Kite, Pileated Woodpecker on Long Island, Varied Thrush, Swainson's Warbler, and Harris' Sparrow. Soaring over and above all of these, Region 9's frigatebird receives the BOTS award. Hopefully the NYSARC review of the sighting details will establish the species.

The complete list totals to 325 plus the two warbler hybrids. Missing, but with reasonable expectations were: Little Blue Heron, Spruce Grouse, Sandhill Crane, King Rail, Piping Plover, Franklin's Gull, Least Tern, Roseate Tern, and Seaside Sparrow. Some of these may simply be too common or regular along the coast to have made their regional highlights.

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REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

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"Look, Ma,—no shadow!" is what some birders are coming to as they spread themselves ever thinner, captured by the challenge of Atlasing while at the same time continuing usual activities. There should be a special Merit Award for the faithful, serious observer who, in spite of the extra load, continues to grind out invaluable reports month after month.

The spring season opened with the icy winter continuing well into March. Then, with southerly winds at last on 11 March, came a flood of birds: Ring-billed Gulls, robins, Starlings, grackles, red-wings and Song Sparrows. On 19 March there were "19 species of Ducks, Geese and Swans in southern Cattaraugus County, possibly the biggest early movement since 1976." (Eaton) Temperatures for the month averaged 1.1° F. (.6° C.) colder than normal and precipitation, 1.4 inches below the usual. On 9 March at Farmersville Station Don and Jane Clark were treated to the sight of eight Turkeys roosting 75 feet from their window and on 28 March Don netted 110 birds, the best banding there in years.

The cold northeaster that dropped six to ten inches of snow 6 to 8 April was a history maker, as the first "blizzard" ever this late, and brought both resident and migrating birds in hordes to feeders. Three of the usual six female Turkeys returned to the Eatons' feeder on Ten Mile Road near Allegany after being absent a week. Temperatures for the month were 2.9° F. (1.6° C.) below normal and precipitation was 1.6 inches below average. Lakes and small ponds were iced in through mid-April—two weeks late. At Farmersville Station 945 birds were netted, making it second only to 1976 as the "best April banding in 17 years" (D. Clark).