

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

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Following a September with temperatures running from just about normal to "the coolest in 17 years" (Region Nine), the weather smoothed to uniformly warm and dry across the state. Periods of Indian Summer succeeded one another through the latter half of the season. November averaged 3° F above normal in most regions. Frost held off at lower elevations until late October or even to late November (Region Ten). The only significant snowfall was 12 inches in the Buffalo area 11 November. The lack of precipitation led to drought fears in Regions One, Four, Nine and Ten. After the record cold of late August, with its early flights of waterfowl, and many predictions for one of the worst fall/winter periods in history, this fall at least points out our shortcomings in long range forecasting.

The general migration was slow and spotty, befitting a season with few strong frontal passages and more southwesterly winds than the expected northwesterlies. Conditions were ideal for strong night movements, noted in the regional reports but reported by few observers. The best days for ground observation were 1, 7, 26-29 September and 1 October. The spotty nature of the migration is probably best recorded in Region One where banding stations at Alfred Station and Franklinville Station, less than 40 miles apart, report "best ever" and "very poor" banding results respectively. Additional banding results are presented in the Region Four and Eight reports. Given the balmy fall, one would expect many reports of late birds. In fact there are many, though not as many as one might expect, and only three record late dates: Royal Tern, 3, 4 and 14 November, and a late and coastal Hooded Warbler, 28 November, both in Region Ten; and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at a late inland date, 28 November, in Region Two. It is probable (in fact, apparent from more recent winter data) that the lack of snow cover and the excellent wild food crop reported in most regions left the lingerers scattered all over the countryside rather than concentrated for easy observation. There is at least one comment of good species totals though poor numbers, a familiar lament in recent years, but even the species total was low this season at 292, though lacking only rarities, as most of the regulars were reported.

Turning next to the usual fall flights, we note first Common Loon numbers good where noted and expected, except in Region Ten, where apparently only one observer even mentioned loons or grebes.

On the negative side, very few Red-throated Loons were reported, with the maximum only nine. The associated grebe picture is mixed, with Pied-billed generally very scarce, except in Region Nine. Generally, waterfowl numbers were good to average, with the usual scattering of lows, particularly among the divers. Puddle ducks received several good reports, but summarized by the table of peak numbers at Montezuma NWR, topped off with an incredible 180,000 Mallards. In addition, there were particularly good numbers of Wood Duck in Regions Eight, Nine and Ten; Gadwall in Region One; Canvasback in Region Nine; 10,000 Lesser Scaup in Region Six; and Ruddy Duck at a new regional high in Region Five. Typical of recent years, Black Duck numbers were a mere shadow of Mallards. Among the raptors, counts were generally poor, reflecting unfavorable winds at the fall mountain and beach hawk watches. In specifics, Turkey Vultures were up in numbers and late in several regions; the Bald Eagle up a bit at 30+ records; accipiters mixed, but low at the beach watches which usually record their fall peaks; Red-shouldered Hawk very few; Broad-winged, very low, but with one very late report, 30 November in Region Eight; Red-tails, most frequently up; Golden Eagles only in Regions Three, Nine and Ten; American Kestrel and Merlin numbers low; and Peregrine Falcon reports at 82+, although 15 of these were a count of birds hacked in Region Seven. The shorebird picture was another spotty one, with feature reports a 15 September flight noted by lakewatchers in Region Two, including 400 Lesser Golden-Plovers, 58 Whimbrels, and 59 Red Knots; good variety in Region Five, with a good count of 24 Hudsonian Godwits; and another thorough shorebird survey by Tom Davis at Jamaica Bay. Also, interestingly, we find Red-necked Phalaropes scattered across six regions, but Red Phalarope only inland in Region Five with a peak of 13+. Missing regulars were Piping Plover, American Oystercatchers, Willet, and Ruff; Help!, Region Ten. The gathering of gulls was termed great in Region One, but was of little note elsewhere across the state. Special notes of interest include: a flock of 700 Laughing Gulls in Region Ten; a peak count of only six Little Gulls in Region Two, the lowest in years; and the failure of the California Gull to reappear in Region Nine, although an immature was recorded in Region Ten. The tern picture was much the same, with only the encouraging numbers of Common Terns in Regions Two, Five, and Six and the record high of 114 Royal Terns in Region Ten of special note. Next we find an exciting "seabird" invasion inland, with good numbers of jaegers in Regions Two and Five; record numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes in Region Five (max. 132 in the period 10-23 October), with good

counts on corresponding dates in Region Two and at Hamilton, Ontario; a Northern Gannet in Regions Two, Three and Five, with dates and descriptions suggesting a single bird for the Region Two and Five records and the date such that the Region Three bird could also be the same; and a Thick-billed Murre in Region Five. To put these numbers in overall perspective, note the gathering of 1000+ kittiwakes in Region Ten in late November. The passerine picture again presents a mixture. Golden-crowned Kinglets were listed as up in numbers in eight regions, recovering well. Ruby-crowned, up in three regions. Blue Jays staged some impressive flights as revealed by high peak counts in Regions Nine and Ten. Thrushes were generally noted as low in numbers and gone early, but this may simply reflect a preponderance of prime, night-flight conditions. For encouragement, note the huge roost of 20,000 American Robins in Region Nine and good Eastern Bluebird reports, including 260 fledged on one nest box trail in Region Nine. The warbler flight was patchy, as noted earlier. There were many very late departure dates and numerous good counts for individual species, with 2500 Yellow-rumped in Region Ten and 15 Hooded in Region Four, new state highs. There were no new trends ranging across regional lines. The sparrow picture was much the same, with one region's low another's high. Finally, winter incursives were low, as might be expected given the weather. Rough-legged Hawk numbers were low, Snowy Owl was reported as only ones or twos, although in eight regions; only one Boreal Chickadee was reported away from Region Seven, Northern Shrikes were few, winter finches were few in species and count, and longspurs and Snow Buntings were scarce.

In addition to the flight groups, there are numerous other species, many of them Blue Listed, which we try to follow. Double-crested Cormorant was up in Regions One, Two, Five and Nine, with a new regional max. of 217 in Region Five, probably not too surprising with their breeding increasing at the east end of Lake Ontario. Both bitterns were very low, with most regional counts just singles. The Common Barn-Owl was reported by only Regions Three and Six, with those in Region Six three found dead after an unsuccessful nesting attempt *last winter*. No Whip-poor-wills were reported and Common Nighthawks were very scarce except for peak migration counts in Regions Three and Eight. Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers continue to increase their ranges and numbers to the north and east. Horned Lark is red-flagged in Regions One, Three, Five and Nine. The Tufted Titmouse continues to strengthen its presence in the north, with two recorded at Tupper Lake to 30 November. Sedge

Wren was unreported; Carolina and Winter Wrens remain very low. The Loggerhead Shrike was reported only in Region Nine, although I know that two lingered in Region Two well into September. Eastern Meadowlark was reported only in six regions, with three of these commenting on low numbers. Among the grassland sparrows, Grasshopper and Henslow's are seldom reported after their singing ceases and so are unsurprisingly scarce at this season, and Vesper received mixed reviews, generally scarce. One could easily expand this type of commentary to a full report in itself.

By carefully scanning the regional reports, one can pull forth numerous nuggets of information. I'll start you off with a few. Birders are always looking for new ways or locations to gather records (list ticks or tables of data); note a Harbor Census in Region One, a Lake Watch in Region Two, and new Hawk Watches in Regions Five and Ten. Region Eight wonders about a Fall Census; Region One has this and Region Two has a September Big Day and a Halloween Treasure Hunt (four hours of searching for marked species, but lots of other data gathered). In contrast to this interest, we find the Federation cancelling pelagic trips for lack of interest. In Region Seven, find reports of a variety of species using Wood Duck nest boxes. The marshes must really be in trouble around New York City, with a Virginia Rail turning to a health food store! In Region Six 15-17 Common Ravens turned up on some deer entrails, another value to deer hunting. Wood Frogs peeped on into November in Region Seven. Banders in Region Eight reported some tidbits on plumage changes and skeletal development, in addition to locating Cedar Waxwings with the orange tail tips typical of the Japanese race. In Region Ten the regional editor managed to tear himself away from the typewriter in the middle of his report and glance out the window long enough to confirm that the House Sparrow is locally in good shape, in spite of no observers reporting them. Undoubtedly, there are many more hidden jewels awaiting your studies of the regional reports.

Looking to the rarities, we find the selection a bit slimmer this fall; 48 species underlined by regional editors, about 24 really rare. The best of the lot are: Region One—Gyr Falcon and Common Raven; Region Two—Northern Gannet; Region Three—Northern Gannet, White Pelican, and Lesser Black-backed Gull; Region Four—Kentucky Warbler; Region Five—Northern Gannet and Thick-billed Murre; Region Seven—Spruce Grouse and Willow Flycatcher; Region Eight—Harlequin Duck; Region Nine—Great Cormorant, Tricolored Heron, American Avocet, Common Raven, Connecticut Warbler, and Dickcissel; and Region Ten—Greater White-fronted Goose, Yellow Rail,

Great Skua, California Gull, Northern Wheatear, and two identifiable subspecies: Rufous-sided "Spotted" Towhee and Northern "Bullock's" Oriole. As usual, in addition to the super-rarities noted, Region Ten had a wide variety of birds which are regular strays there, but which would have been exciting finds in almost any other region.

The BOTS (Bird of the Season) award goes to the Northern Gannet that appeared in Regions Two, Three, and Five. From the dates and plumage descriptions, there would seem to be a possibility that all records were of the same individual. It is hoped that this misguided individual finally found his way back to salt water.

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EDITORS' NOTE

This issue marks the changing of the guard in Regions Two, Seven and Eight. Bob Spahn, Region Two editor, will be followed by Kevin Griffith. However, Bob is not leaving us, but is assuming the post of permanent Highlights editor.

In Region Seven, the press of other affairs has forced Ted Mack to pass the baton to John M. C. Peterson. Better known as Mike, he is the current Region Seven Atlas compiler.

In Region Eight, Bill Cook will be unable to continue as he will be spending several months each year in Alaska. Fortunately, Ed Reilly, a past President of the Federation, has agreed to take the post.

We are not sure that the readers fully realize the magnitude of the task that the Regional editors undertake each quarter. *The Kingbird* editors do, and marvel both at the excellent work and the willingness to assume this "labor of love."

We wish to thank Bob, Ted and Bill for their past efforts and welcome their successors.

The Editors