

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

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This was the season in which the Breeding Bird Atlas Project really took off in many regions, with regular Atlasers and blockbusters combining to provide much data from areas relatively unbirded in the past. This volume of data has produced many very interesting breeding records and trends, but considerable difficulty in making historical comparisons due to the gross increase in observer activity. "One thing, however, is obvious, there are many areas in Region — [insert any region number] that deserve deeper investigation," to borrow a phrase from Harriet Marsi.

The weather was relatively uniform across the state, with most regions reporting prolonged hot spells and little rain from at least the second week in June to mid-August. Much of the rain which did fall came in torrents on a few days accompanied in several regions by severe weather, including thunderstorms, hail, and tornadoes. The generally warm, dry weather appeared to be ideal for breeding birds and Atlasers, except that song shut down a bit early on hot days and the heat beat down the observers. The cool early June weather pushed breeding back a bit for some species in many areas, providing for useful Atlasing into early August. It was very interesting that, in spite of a cool May and early June, several regions commented on a lack of late migrants into early June, especially among passerines. Region 10 seems to be the only notable exception to this, with a number of warbler migrants straggling through to quite late dates in June. Similarly, at season's end, the first push of fall migrants was still very slim and there were almost no significantly early migration dates.

As this season encompasses the heart of the breeding season, it is appropriate that we first look in some detail at the noteworthy breeding reports. As noted by Mike Peterson in Region 7, the sheer volume of records from Atlas work makes traditional format reporting difficult. In several reports, including Region 7, you will find different approaches to weaving Atlas data into the records. Looking for specific, exciting breeding records, you will find a wide variety. Very large Great Blue Heron colonies are noted in Regions 3 and 7. Reports of potentially breeding (though probably only summering) American Wigeon come from Regions 1, 2, and 6. From Montezuma NWR in Region 3 we have the usual table of waterfowl counts plus note of a dramatic drop in nesting productivity of waterfowl, grebes, American Coot, and Common Moorhen as the main pool was drawn down for necessary dike repairs. Among the raptor reports were an encouraging increase in Osprey nesting, with more hacking in Region 1, nesting in 2, 3, and

4, a pair nesting, though unsuccessfully, in 5, and excellent nesting reports from 7 and 10; Northern Harrier reports increasing in nearly all upstate regions plus possible nesting at Jamaica Bay NWR in Region 10; and the success of the Peregrine Falcon bridge nests in New York City, plus note of Barn Owls using similar sites there. As noted by Joseph DiCostanzo, these will become the world's most expensive eyries as they become unsafe for vehicular traffic. Spruce Grouse appeared in a new location as Region 5's first confirmed nesting. Many regions reported more rails than usual, certainly just a result of more intense Atlasing. In Region 1 a record late date, 16 July, for Killdeer eggs was tied at the same spot where a late nest was found in 1979. Among the gulls and terns is a first confirmed Great Black-backed Gull nesting in Region 5 and excellent tern nesting success reported from Region 10, although Black-crowned Night-Herons continue to be serious predators in some tern colonies. Owl notes include Short-eared confirmed in Region 5, mid-summer records in Region 4, and a congregation of 25-30 young Eastern Screech-Owls in one back yard in Region 2 for several days in June. Red-headed Woodpecker, Acadian Flycatcher, Cliff Swallow, Swainson's Thrush, White-eyed Vireo, Prairie Warbler, and Kentucky Warbler all were reported in increasing numbers or extending ranges in several regions. With the late breeding season came two additional late nestling dates: Brown Thrasher on 29 July in Region 1 and Eastern Bluebird on 25 August in Region 9. Species which can be anticipated as additions to our breeding species include the Brewer's Blackbirds in Region 2, present into June this year, and the Summer Tanagers of Region 10, possibly following one of their major spring incursions, such as this year. Along with all the upbeat breeding news came a few negatives: Pied-billed Grebe low, especially in Regions 3 and 7; American Bittern low across the state; American Black Duck very low where noted in Regions 2, 3, 5, and 6; Common Nighthawk low; Sedge Wren only in Regions 5 and 7; Loggerhead Shrike down to only one breeding site in Region 6; a local crash in Indigo Bunting numbers reported in Region 10; and many regions red-flagging Vesper, Grasshopper, and Henslow's Sparrows. Additional breeding bird data may be found in commentaries on Breeding Bird Survey results in Regions 1 and 6.

Of course this season is not all breeding; we have the tail end of spring migration in early June and the start of fall migration from late June on. While both migrations were rather weak this season, there are abundant non-breeding notes to be gleaned from the regional reports. Common Loons were reported from all regions, with relatively large numbers in some where they normally don't breed; an indication

of problems in traditional breeding areas? Brant were recorded at late spring dates in Regions 2, 3 and 7 and in large numbers, 3,000, in Region 10, all between 6 and 8 June. The numbers in the Montezuma NWR waterfowl table in the Region 3 report reflect the drawdown of the main pool and the late start for this fall's migration. That same pool drawdown did result in better shorebirding than has been experienced there in several years. Elsewhere, poor shorebirding was noted for Regions 1, 2, 5, and 6, possibly correlating with an early algal bloom and low levels of invertebrates along the Lake Ontario shore as suggested in the Region 6 report, contrasting with excellent shorebird reports from Region 10 where several much sought after species have become regular, and annual surprises are almost expected. Skipping around to illustrate other types of information you can look for, we find: date records: early White-rumped Sandpiper—9 July in Region 6, Pileated Woodpecker summering in Region 10, Tennessee Warbler—17 July in Region 2, and Parasitic Jaeger—27 August in Regions 2 and 6; trends: Common Black-headed, Little, and Lesser Black-backed Gulls more or less regular in summer in Region 10; exotics: Parrot Jungle of the North-Nyack/Piermont in Region 9, several species in Region 3, and more reports of the "eradicated" Monk Parakeet from Region 10; a pelagic trip with good results in Region 10; behavioral notes: Blue Jays eating Gypsy Moth larvae in Region 3, and cowbird parasitism on Black-capped Chickadee in Region 5 and Yellow-throated Vireo and Least Flycatcher in Region 10; and finally, an environmental warning from Region 9 where water chestnut is once more (after 30 years in check) expanding in shallow bays along the Hudson and threatening to shade out other plant species used as food by waterfowl.

As usual, among the 298 species recorded for this summer season were special treats, the rarities, most of which are highlighted early in each regional report and bold-faced in the text. Especially outstanding among these (and not mentioned above) are: Iceland and Common Black-headed Gulls far out of date range in Region 1; Royal Tern from 31 July to 2 August in Region 2, about as far inland as any has ever occurred on the continent; Three-toed Woodpecker far south for summer in Region 3; regional firsts for Tricolored Heron and Cerulean Warbler in Region 7; a Blue Grosbeak family group and a Western Meadowlark into summer in Region 9; and in Region 10 a first regional summer record of Eared Grebe, a second state record for Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and a first state record for Little Stint. Several of these are obviously contenders for bird of the season, but as this is the heart of the breeding season, the BOTS Award goes to the state's first breeding pair of Palm Warblers and their offspring in Region 7.

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