

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

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To borrow from Paul DeBenedictis of Region 5, "All in all, it was a typically interesting, but hardly outstanding fall season." As usual, the reports are strongly weather-influenced. In most regions a hot summer extended through at least the first half of September, followed by a cold snap, then a warm fall. In most areas there were few major fronts in September and early October, and precipitation was low until November when rain and/or snowfall was average to well above average. Regions 9 and 10 were exceptions in averaging much warmer than the rest of the state and in reporting record rainfall, nearly twice normal for the year. It is not surprising in view of this that Region 9 was the only region noting good wild food crops when most regions to the north and west mentioned low cone, fruit, and berry crops. The general effects on the regional reports are thus not surprising. In several regions waterfowl reports provided the most excitement with the passerine migration termed poor. Strong nocturnal flights were noted on only a few dates with a few good groundings observed on the following days. TV tower kills were very low; the lowest in 20 years in Region 3. For a warm fall, one surprise might be the dearth of really late departure dates reported.

Most of the standard fall flights were average to weak, though there were at least some high points in each. Loon and grebe numbers were average for recent years, up and down in particular regions, capped by a new state high count for Common Loon in Region 1. Waterfowl provided the most widespread excitement, with some noteworthy numbers or dates in nearly every region. Once again, Region 3 provides a good summary, comparable with past years, in a table of peak counts at Montezuma NWR. We really need long term averages and standard deviations for the assessment of current seasons' data in various regions. Other interesting waterfowl data include: a state high count of Tundra Swans in Region 1; good counts for Snow Goose in Regions 4, 7, and 9; large Brant movements on 3-6 November in Regions 2 and 5, contrasting with none in Region 1; 5,000 Oldsquaws in Region 5; good Black Scoter counts away from the ocean or Great Lakes in Regions 3 and 4; and the simultaneous arrival dates for Harlequin Ducks in Regions 2 and 10. The major raptor flights of the fall were, as usual, along the ridges and peaks and the beaches in Regions 9 and 10. The results documented in those regional reports were better than last year, but reporting was spotty, and in some cases slow. A new hawk watch was located at Butler Sanctuary near Mt. Kisco in Region 9. Among the more closely monitored species, Ospreys persisted late in several

regions; the Bald Eagle total ran a bit below last year at about 26 with half of these in Region 9; Red-shouldered Hawks continued low; and Peregrine Falcons remained about the same at about 75 individuals across eight regions. The later shorebird migration reportedly suffered from habitat problems, too much or too little water in most regions, yet there were still interesting records including: a state fall high count for Black-bellied Plover in Region 10; a good, late count of 500 Red Knots in Region 10; late White-rumped Sandpipers in Regions 2, 5, 7, and 9; and numerous other regional, relatively late dates. The family *Laridae* provided more negatives and missing notes than positives. Jaeger counts were down along Lake Ontario, probably due to the preponderance of SW winds, and not mentioned along the coast. Iceland Gull was not reported. However, inland Black-legged Kittiwake numbers were good again in Regions 2 and 5; good gull numbers were reported generally from Region 6; Common Terns lingered in Regions 2 and 5, an immature on the same late date—the same bird?, in Region 10; Forster's Tern was well reported in five regions; and good numbers of Royal Terns were again reported in Region 10. The passerine flight was generally described as poor. There were few really good days anywhere, two major exceptions being 9 October in Region 5 providing several record high counts and a 4 October backyard bonanza in Region 10. From Region 9 come several excellent counts of passing non-raptors from hawk watches and the suggestion that more hawk watches try to count all birds passing; great when hawks are few and/or people many, but otherwise difficult. When carried out on "good days," amazingly high counts often result. Incursives were noted as widespread, but generally in low numbers and not tarrying long. Among those usually awaited expectantly in the fall are: Rough-legged Hawk, low numbers, but very close arrival dates across the state; Snowy Owls, again few and arriving in a narrow spread of dates; Black-backed Woodpecker, unrecorded; Boreal Chickadee, straying only to Regions 5 and 9 outside the Adirondacks; Bohemian Waxwing in Regions 2, 5, and 9; and all of the winter finches except White-winged Crossbill and Hoary Redpoll here and there, briefly and in small numbers.

After scanning the checklist once for the major flights, we can wander through again looking a little more closely for interesting notes; highs, low, early, late, and similarities and contrasts between neighboring regions. Examples of each may be gleaned from the regional reports. Among the highs not previously mentioned are: 1,000 Northern Gannets in Region 10; Double-crested Cormorants reported in nine regions, with upstate reports certainly being a function of increased nesting on Little Galloo Island, and peaking at 4,000 in Region 10; also in Region 10 an enormous Northern Flicker flight along the beaches and state high counts of 500-600 Fish Crows and 1,100 Cedar Waxwings; a high

tally of 52 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds passing the Butler Sanctuary hawk watch; and the fallout of 9 October in Region 5 resulting in a state high of 750 Golden-crowned Kinglets and excellent counts of 150 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 48 Winter Wrens, and 65 Rufous-sided Towhees. Additional lows included: no reports of Common Barn-Owl and Louisiana Waterthrush; only single regions reporting Wilson's Phalarope—Region 3, Sedge Wren—Region 2, and Golden-winged Warbler—Region 5; and Common Raven only in Region 1 outside of the Adirondacks. Early arrivals are usually few at this season, since the fall migration really starts in the summer season, but a Dovekie in Region 2 on 22 September must be considered early. Late records are more numerous, with the most outstanding: Osprey: 17-18 November in Region 7; Red-headed Woodpecker carrying food on 15 September in Region 10; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: 30 November in Region 9; Yellow-throated Vireo on 13 October in Region 10; and Yellow Warbler on 9 October in Region 5, a new inland late date. Several regional similarities to whet your appetite for further study were: House Wren with relatively late and close departure dates in six regions; the appearance of Western Kingbird in Regions 3, 4, 8, and 10, five birds in the latter; Swainson's Thrush generally providing the best thrush counts across many regions, though noted as scarce in others; Connecticut Warblers appearing in seven regions, with about 15 reports; Am. Tree Sparrows arriving over a close date range in Regions 1-7; and Sharp-tailed Sparrow, normally scarce away from the coast, observed in Regions 1 and 7.

Typically, in addition to the species records themselves, there are numerous interesting observations buried in the regional reports. Again to whet your appetites, here are a few. In Regions 4 and 10 we have examples of long term site fidelity in the returns of the Lesser Black-backed Gull and Tufted Duck, respectively. In Region 3 we find a Northern Mockingbird defending a bush load of berries from starlings. A Mute Swan with brood in Region 6 is reported as a questionable blessing. In Region 7 the 7 October earthquake is accompanied by a shrieking Barred Owl and waves of moving Canada Geese, the latter put into better perspective by noting a large movement across the state on that and adjacent dates. More serious is the gunning down of an American Kestrel at a hawk watch in Region 7. Region 8 reports a singing Northern Shrike on 26 November. Are we all aware that to date Cornell Lab has no recording of this species and would appreciate help in pinning down a cooperative individual? Finally from Region 10, close your eyes and try to imagine no less than four American Kestrels attacking a Red Bat.

The rarity litany is again long, at least 52 species boldfaced or underlined. My choices for the most outstanding from each region follow; you can pick your own. Region 1—MacGillivray's Warbler, a new state

species if accepted by NYSARC (see page 40 of this issue for full details); Region 2—a November occurrence of Yellow-throated Warbler; Region 3—two Western Grebes on Keuka Lake; Region 4—Brewer's Blackbird; Region 5—Piping Plover, the first in that region since 1978; Region 6—Tricolored Heron; Region 7—Sharp-tailed Sparrow; Region 8—Western Kingbird; Region 9—Black Vulture; and Region 10—Arctic Tern. As usual, Region 10 noted a host of species which are very rare elsewhere, but regularly recorded near the coast. In view of this large number of contenders for the BOTS Award, it is indeed fortunate that the bird of the year was turned up by the A.O.U.'s centennial gathering in Region 10. Thought to be extinct for nearly 140 years, a Great Auk was observed and photographed. For some reason (possibly the fact that it was pushing a cake), no details are to be filed with NYSARC, but a photo is on file at the AMNH and surely complete details will be available in a future issue of *The Auk*.

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REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

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The weather in the Niagara Frontier Region this fall was more normal than one year ago, all three months having only fractionally higher than normal average temperatures at Buffalo where the meteorological data is obtained. The very warm weather of the summer of '83 continued through the first ten days of September with the first significant cold front of the season occurring on the 12th. Climatic conditions remained warm and damp until 21 Sept. when unseasonably cold weather invaded the area. Robert Sundell reported one inch of snow in Brocton in Chautauqua Co. on the 23rd which quickly melted, and heavy early morning frosts were recorded in the valleys and higher elevations of the Southern Tier counties on the 24th and 25th. However, all this dramatic weather change failed to induce any major migratory movement, and September was generally a disappointing month for the passage of passerines, especially thrushes, vireos and warblers. October and November in contrast were considerably more exciting, with the first mass flight of waterfowl into the region coinciding with the passage of a cold front on 9 Oct. Flocks of Canada Geese were reported in all sections on the 9th and 10th but warm weather quickly returned with a record high temperature of 82° F recorded at Buffalo on 13 Oct. Gale force southwesterly winds on the 14th with gusts up to 60 mph ushered in another cold front which brought snow flurries at higher elevations in the Southern Tier counties and below normal temperatures for the remainder of the