

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

ROBERT SPAHN

Last year's high level of Breeding Bird Atlas activity was matched or exceeded in this year's effort to complete the project's field work. The results are at least touched upon in most of the regional reports, especially in Region 7 where Mike Peterson again reminds us of the tremendous change in level of documentation of the breeding season these past five years with respect to any prior period. What will next summer's (or the year after, since mop-up Atlas work will continue in 1985) reports look like?

This summer's weather was probably relatively typical of New York, with much variability from month to month. Upstate, most regions reported a cool start to June, following a cool May, then nearly ideal weather for nesting birds and Atlassing birders through July. The early cool start apparently pushed breeding back a bit, providing for productive Atlassing through early August. August was WET. Downstate, the June and July Atlas season saw precipitation well above normal, followed by a warm, dry August. In spite of any potential dampening of birders' spirits in these regions, all Atlas blocks were entered and coverage virtually completed.

Let us now look in more detail at the highlights of the results of all this extra Atlas effort. In general, we have obtained a much better picture of some species' ranges, several having significantly changed in just the past ten years since the publication of John Bull's *Birds of New York State*. The maturing pine forests in the higher elevations of western and central regions, planted during the Depression, are now being found to harbor numbers of breeders, not formerly associated with these geographical areas, such as: Golden-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Clay-colored Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and White-throated Sparrow. Other species have been reported in significantly increased numbers or with expanding ranges including: Double-crested Cormorant with active colonies now in Regions 6, 7, & 10; Great Blue Heron; Gadwall; Wild Turkey - increasing northward; several species of gulls and terns - particularly well documented in the Region 10 report; Acadian Flycatcher in seven regions; Common Raven in five regions; Fish Crow moving inland; Blue-gray Gnatcatcher; White-eyed Vireo and Philadelphia Vireo in Regions 7 & 8; Nashville Warbler into the lake plain in Wayne Co.; Cape May Warbler in Region 7; Cerulean Warbler - generally; Kentucky Warbler in Regions 1, 5, & 9; another CO for Blue Grosbeak in Region 9; House Finches booming all over; Lincoln's Sparrow with reports up as more observers become aware of their habitat requirements and song; and Evening Grosbeak westward and southward. Of special note this year

we have continued Bald Eagle and Osprey hacking, with these projects contributing to the two nesting pairs of eagles in the state and imminent nesting of Ospreys in Region 1 after long absence; the fledging of young again by a Peregrine Falcon pair from the Throgs Neck Bridge; the Piping Plover nesting at Sandy Pond in Region 5, marred by the loss of one fledgling to beach vehicles as the water level dropped, allowing public access a bit too early; Black-backed Woodpecker new to the breeding list of Region 8; and the surprise thrushes in Region 4, including the number of Swainson's found and a singing Gray-cheeked. Three more species have produced mixed emotions: Monk Parakeet still holding on in Region 9, Mute Swan CO in Region 6, and Canada Goose increasing in several regions. Clear negative trends flagged this year include: low numbers for Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, Black-crowned Night-Heron, and Blue-winged Teal - particularly in Region 6; both cuckoos low across the state; Barn Owl - only one report, from Region 8; a few flags for Chimney Swift; Sedge Wren in only Regions 2, 3, & 6; Loggerhead Shrike now breeding only in Region 6; and few reports for Yellow-breasted Chat. Two interesting approaches to summarizing such Atlas data may be found in the reports from Regions 4 & 7. Typically the bulk of the data is received too late for such relatively complete summary, but possibly after next year's mop-up we can look for some general commentary from each region.

Since this "season" really also overlaps both migration periods, it is appropriate that we look next at records associated with the spring and fall passages. Generally, while cool and wet were common to May in 1983 and 1984, this spring the tail of the migration produced far more late records; some well into June. Some of the best of these were: Lesser Golden-Plover - 15 June, Region 1; Tundra Swan and "Blue" Goose - 4 June, Region 4; Rough-legged Hawk - 4 July, Region 2; Sandhill Crane - June and July, Regions 6, 9 & 10; Common Black-headed Gull - four June dates, Region 1; Glaucous Gull - 13 June, Region 10; Summer Tanager - 18 June, Region 10; and Rusty Blackbird - 2 June, Region 1. The start of fall migration, by contrast, was similar to last year's; termed slow or poor by many regions. Among the very early fall dates we have only: Common Black-headed Gull - 31 August in Region 1; Lincoln's Sparrow - 26 August, Region 2, and 27 August, Region 8; and White-throated Sparrow - 13-14 July, Region 10. You will also find among the groups of species expected at this time, wandering white herons were few, the small south-shore Lake Ontario raptor movement was late, shorebirds were variable - generally better coastal than inland, and most passerines were late and few. Yet, there still were some interesting high counts including: 100+ Ruddy Turnstones - 4 June, Region 2; 30 Solitary Sandpipers - in both Regions 3 & 9; 500 Semipalmated Sandpipers in Region 8; and 672 Blue Jays and 1,913 Cedar Waxwings - 2 June, Region 1.

As usual, there are notes of general interest which don't quite fit above. Let's look at a few. Regions 1 and 5 provide detailed summaries and comparisons for Breeding Bird Survey results. From Region 2 we have the final summary from the spring hawk watch and the start of a fall lake watch. The Region 3 report contains the usual table of peak waterfowl numbers from Montezuma NWR and a table of nesting results. There are obviously still problems accompanying the loosestrife war. Region 1 reports an Eastern Bluebird nest box trail summary. An abundant cone crop is noted by many, flagging an event of continent-wide proportions. The continued spread of Beech Blight is noted in Region 1 and Gypsy Moth outbreaks in Regions 1 & 3. As new nest sites we hear of rooftop Killdeer and Cliff Swallows moving under large bridges. The Region 7 report of numerous sightings of dyed gulls from a Vermont study remind us of the many studies underway in which we can participate by noting the details of marked bird sightings. A question from the Region 8 report on mid-July movements of Tennessee Warblers is easily answered by recalling numerous such reports across the state in recent years, including another from Region 5 this year. For a final solemn note, we have the Region 9 editor applauding the improved water clarity in the Hudson, but then wondering what the soluble toxins are doing to birds (and people?) making increased use of this clearer water. As usual, this compilation only scratches the surface to whet your appetites. There is much more available to the interested reader.

Typically, there are many rarities this season, again summarized near the start of the regional reports. The best of the lot, by region, are: Region 1 - King Rail and Common Black-headed Gull; Region 2 - Marbled Godwit, Long-tailed Jaeger, and Fish Crow; Region 3 - Laughing Gull, Common Raven, and Clay-colored Sparrow; Region 4 - Gray-cheeked Thrush and Fish Crow; Region 5 - Piping Plover, Ring-necked Duck, and Kentucky Warbler; Region 6 - Sandhill Crane; Region 7 - Tricolored Heron, Franklin's Gull and Caspian Tern; Region 8 - Rufous Hummingbird - first state record, pending NYSARC review, Wilson's Phalarope, and Black-backed Woodpecker; Region 9 - Little Blue Heron, Sandhill Crane, Kentucky Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak; and Region 10 - Sandhill Crane, Wilson's Plover, Little Stint - second state record, Arctic Tern - 6!, Sooty Tern, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Again, Region 10 really is a world apart relative to the rest of the state, with many additional records which would be first class rarities in any other region. The BOTS award for this breeding season must again go to a new breeding species for the state, the Yellow-throated Warbler, found breeding in both Region 1 and Region 8. Both nestings fledged young; both nests were collected and preserved.

716 High Tower Way, Webster, New York 14580