

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

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After careful scrutiny of this season's reports, the major highlight of the season is the excellent wild fruit, berry, and cone crop reported across the whole state, giving rise to hopes that Winter might bring feathered flocks from the north and maybe even draw or hold some rarities—hopes as yet unfulfilled from what I have heard. Two of the regional editors give very succinct summaries for this Fall with Dick Clements' single word "Pleasant" and John Peterson's recollection of the phrase we most often heard in the field, at home, at work, . . . everywhere, "where are the birds?" While, as Peterson again reminds us "Fall is a largely subjective season, . . .", we still watch for the seasonal passages of waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, etc., even if we can't draw accurate conclusions about trends, and this year most of these were a disappointment to most of us. As is often the case, we can draw solace from the fact that the apparent cause of this fall's weather was Summer or Indian Summer lingering through most of the season, with few frontal passages to bring us the groundings of migrants which we all await. There are also the scattered reports of high numbers, late dates, good banding sessions, etc. to suggest that maybe it wasn't really as bad as it seemed and maybe we either just missed the good days or migration was delayed or . . . ?

When you turn to the regional reports to study your favorite fall flights, you will find some bright spots in each group. The loon and grebe picture is really little changed from that of other recent years, and there is a regional early arrival date for Red-throated Loon in Region Five on 12 Sept. The herons then provide a host of late dates, with an inland record late date for Great Egret - 27 Nov. in Region Three; Snowy Egret at a regional late date in Region Five; Tricolored Heron very late in Region Nine; Cattle Egret very late in Regions One, Three and Five; and a rare fall report of Glossy Ibis from Region Two. The waterfowl passage was generally termed unexceptional, particularly among the divers, but again we have many individual bright spots, highlighted by a state record early date for Snow Goose - 12 Sept. in Region Seven; and several very high counts, including state record high counts at Montezuma NWR (Region Three) for Mallard—an incredible 400,000, Am. Black Duck—20,000, and Ring-necked Duck—8,000; and a very high 10,000 Com. Mergansers in Region Six. The raptor migration was poor to average over much of the state, though at near record highs at the hawk watches of Region Nine, summarized in a table in that report. Among the raptors, Turkey Vultures lingered late and were recorded at high levels of 100... in Regions One and Nine,

Ospreys and Broad-winged Hawks were recorded at very late dates in several regions, and the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon totals were up a bit, in spite of some missing reports. Shorebirds were again quite variable, depending mainly on habitat, with the best at the drawn-down pool at Montezuma and at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge where Arthur Morris continued Tom Davis' census work with several contrasts in numbers and timing reported for this year in comparison with that past data base. In this group, too, there are late dates—Baird's Sandpiper in Regions Two and Five and Wilson's Phalarope in Region Three, and high counts, such as three Am. Avocets, 4379 Dunlin, and 50-60 Am. Oystercatchers, all in Region Ten. There are interesting gull and tern reports in several regions, but to me the most interesting (from a soap-box climbing standpoint) is the lack of a report from Region One of the tremendous gathering of gulls this fall, both in terms of numbers and variety. The observers were there. There were several days at least with 11-13 species recorded. The commoner species were in the hundreds of thousands, and numbers of individuals of several rarer species, such as Sabine's Gull (two to three), Thayer's Gull (two to three), Com. Black-headed Gull (two), and Lesser Black-backed Gull (two plus). It seems that too many just won't take the time to report or assume others will do it (*mea culpa* in this case as I assumed the local leader of our joint trip would file the trip report for that Region.). This is not a Region One problem alone. It is widespread and, in just this season alone, Regions Four and Six also lamented the lack of reports. Remember that in order to judge trends we (your regional editors) need data, dates and numbers, from which to produce distributions with which we can evaluate the significance of departures from average. Short of that we have only educated guesses or commentary on the obvious.

On to the passerine passage. Again, in spite of few groundings of any magnitude, we do have some excellent high counts and a number of late dates. The best counts included 90 Fish Crows in Region Nine; 500, 180, and 300 Water Pipits in Regions Three, Five, and Nine, respectively, and a state high 500 Northern Orioles in one hour passing, the west end of Jones Beach in Region Ten. Late dates include a regional late Cliff Swallow in Region Five, a late House Wren in Region Ten, state late House Wren nestlings to 1 Sept. in Region One, a very late Tennessee Warbler in Region Ten on 28 Oct., an inland record late Yellow Warbler on 24 Oct. in Region One, a state late Cerulean Warbler on 8 Oct. in Region Three, and very late dates for Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Region Six, Orchard Oriole in Region Ten, and Northern Oriole in Region Seven. A single early passerine arrival was a state record early Am. Tree Sparrow on 23 Sept. in Region Two. Not covered by these family groups, but of special interest for dates and numbers were

a high count of 400 Chimney Swifts on 21 Sept. in Region One, a very late Greater Shearwater on 12 Nov. in Region Ten, a late inland Black-billed Cuckoo on 8 Nov. in Region Nine, an inland record-tying late (and only one of the season) Whip-poor-will on 16 Oct. in Region Four, and a very late Ruby-throated Hummingbird on 20 Nov. in Region Ten. Winter incursives did not show. Rough-legged Hawks were few, Snowy Owls a scattered few, and winter finches virtually confined to Region Seven. Even Evening Grosbeaks were few thruout the state.

As usual, one can find a wealth of interesting notes scattered thru the regional reports. Again, to help spur you to get started, a few follow. You will find that tower kills and banding reports are much lower than usual, in keeping with other assessments of the migration. In Region Four, we find a Com. Loon stranded in a small pond, eventually caught and set free on a body of water large enough so it could take off. Region Six reports the virtual extirpation of Ring-necked Pheasants except for the annual released few. From Region Nine we note the report of a lack of correlation in Broad-winged Hawk peak dates for hawk watches only 20 miles apart. In that report we find that most of us search the wrong places for Yellow Rail as window shopping birders in downtown New Rochelle pick one up in an alley. We see two parts of the House Finch dilemma, with Region Six reporting House Finch way up and House Sparrow way off at feeders, while Region Three cheers a White-breasted Nuthatch standing up to these new pests. From the Region Four description we try to envision a cat-and-mouse game between a Cooper's Hawk and a Pileated Woodpecker; what next? Finally, there is our reminder of site fidelity possibilities for rarities, with Lesser Black-backed Gull and Tufted Duck back once again in Region Ten, though the Region One Barrow's Goldeneye failed to return by season's end. Such listings are limited only by your interest and willingness to read carefully.

The rarity picture mirrored this fall's overall scene, a bit reduced from the recent past, but still exciting. The regions' best include: Region One—Cattle Egret and Sabine's Gull; Region Two—White Pelican, Marbled Godwit, and "Black" Brant; Region Three—Cattle Egret and Greater White-fronted Goose; Region Five—Greater White-fronted Goose, Sabine's Gull, and Western Kingbird; Region Seven—Red Phalarope and Northern Wheatear; Region Nine—Black Vulture, Yellow Rail, Three-toed Woodpecker, and Yellow-headed Blackbird; and Region Ten—Gyr Falcon, California Gull, Arctic Tern, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, and Black-throated Gray Warbler. As usual, several of these would have been candidates for the BOTS Award in another year, but for this season that distinction falls to Region Ten's Ash-throated Flycatcher, well-photographed, to become the state's third confirmed record.

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