

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Yellow-rumped Warbler in flight feather molt on Great Gull Island: On 28 August 1983, I netted an adult (AHY) female Yellow-rumped ("Myrtle") Warbler (*Dendroica coronata coronata*) on Great Gull Island, Suffolk County. Most of its body was still in alternate plumage, although a few brownish feathers had appeared on the back. However, the flight feathers of the wings and tail were in heavy molt. Primaries 9-5 on each side were worn and faded; primary 4 was somewhat less than half grown; and growing primaries 3-1 formed a graded series of increasing length. When the bird was netted, the outermost tail feather on each side (rectrix 6) was present, also in worn condition. One of these fell off before the bird was released, and had obviously been ready to be shed. The remaining rectrices were growing in, virtually simultaneously, and had reached about one-third its normal length.

Although both of John Bull's books (1964, *Birds of the New York Area*, p. 376; 1974, *Birds of New York State*, p. 486) indicate that there are a few August records for migrant Yellow-rumped Warblers in New York, the species is said to be "rare before September." This statement must obviously exclude records from the immediate vicinity of the breeding areas within the state.

Wood warblers normally undergo their complete prebasic molt on or very near the breeding locality. This is illustrated, in the case of the Yellow-rumped Warbler, by three Canadian specimens in the collection of Carnegie Museum of Natural History, all of which are in a molt stage close to that of the Great Gull Island bird. Specimen 111116 was collected 26 August 1931 at Moose Factory, Ontario. It retains the two outermost worn primaries on the right wing and the outermost (only) on the left wing. Specimen 129630 was collected 10 August 1942 at Aklavik, Northwest Territories, and retains five old primaries on the right wing and four on the left. Finally, specimen 156692 was collected 28 August 1933 at Wolfville, Nova Scotia, and retains three old primaries on each wing. All of these were collected at breeding localities for the species, as indicated by the presence of juveniles taken at the same time and place.

The southernmost New York breeding localities for Yellow-rumped Warblers known to Bull were in the Shawangunk Mountains. However, the nearest breeding localities to Great Gull Island are not in New York but in Connecticut. The southernmost proven breeding site for this species in that state is at the White Memorial in Litchfield, roughly a 70-mile straight-line distance from Great Gull Island. However, the species is suspected to breed in the Union forest, northeasternmost Tolland County, which is approximately 50 miles directly to the north of Great Gull Island.

It is impossible, of course, to know whether the Great Gull Island bird's flight had originated in nearby Connecticut or substantially farther north. However, as indicated above, wood warblers do not normally leave their breeding grounds before molting and then undergo the complete prebasic molt at some intermediate staging area. Although I cannot be certain that this bird arrived on Great Gull Island during the night of 27-28 August, it had not been netted or seen by any of the Island personnel before that date. The heavy molt of the flight feathers would seem to preclude this bird's having flown very far; in fact, it is amazing

that it ventured to cross either the eight miles of open water across Long Island Sound from Connecticut or the three miles from Plum Island to the west. That it succeeded in making such a crossing makes one wonder about the validity of the careful computations of "wing loading capacity" in the literature, based on planimetric measurements of tracings of complete (*i.e.*, fully feathered) wings.

The warbler was netted and banded under the permits issued to Helen Hays, Chairman of the American Museum of Natural History's Great Gull Island Project. I am indebted to Noble S. Proctor for information on the breeding range of the Yellow-rumped Warbler in Connecticut.

This is contribution no. 65 from the Great Gull Island Project, American Museum of Natural History.

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Spectacular Flight of Purple Finches at Derby Hill: White and Norway Spruce in the winter of 1984-85 had an extremely abundant cone crop. Southern Onondaga and Madison Counties, northern Cortland and Chenango Counties had hundreds of acres planted with these trees in the 1930's. There are also Larch, Red Pine and mixed deciduous trees.

This entire area was used heavily this winter by several finch species. Predominant were White-winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins. There were also Red Crossbills, Purple Finches and Evening Grosbeaks. Almost none of these species visited feeding stations, probably because of the natural food available. It was not unusual to see many small flocks of 20-30 Purple Finches feeding in the cones. Concentrations of finches must have occurred in other areas as well, where cones were abundant.

On 18 April 1985 weather predictions were perfect for a hawk flight at Derby Hill. But the front did not move. The weather continued overcast with rain and light southeast winds. The only birds moving were flocks of finches. Most of the observers watched for flocks to point out to Scheider who counted the flocks and kept the total count. By noon the weather broke enough for some hawks to migrate, and still flocks of 50 to 200 Purple Finches kept coming. The peak flight was between 1130 and 1500 hours. By late afternoon, Scheider's count was 7700. There had been 500 Purple Finches before his arrival, making a total for the day of 8200. Previous high reported was 600, Riis Park, 17 November 1973 (Bull 1976, *Supplement to Birds of New York State*, Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, Inc., p. 44). Gerry Smith, the Derby Hill observer, reported there were essentially no Purple Finches either the day before or after this flight.

During the entire day there were no more than 30 Pine Siskins, one small flock of Evening Grosbeaks and no crossbills.

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