

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

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Continuing where last season left off, this season did bring us a better selection to tempt us all afield. This was Spring! It's always better than winter for selection. However, Joseph DiCostanzo in Region 10 summarizes well the thoughts of many with, "It was a dismal spring migration. Many birders called it the worst in memory." The only real dissent from this came in Region 7's excellent banding results and a spring judged "better than last year." A few editors grasping for something positive noted that the weather was pleasant for observers. Generally speaking, variety, even rarities, was quite good and major complaints concerned low numbers, especially during the early-to-mid-May period when so many birders look for the waves of grounded migrants for their warbler "fix" to see them through another year. With very few, very local exceptions, this simply did not occur in New York this spring.

For explanation, we can as usual look to the weather. No contrasts to play upon this season. Warm and dry prevailed everywhere; almost no late winter snow except for Region 7 and rainfall way behind nearly everywhere until late May. Drought in the eastern regions looms on the horizon. The warmth of March and most of April brought a surge of record early dates for singles of many species in many locations in the last ten days of April, then a flat May weatherwise resulted in almost no significant groundings over most of the state. As Ed Treacy notes in Region 9, and as I heard from other contacts, Atlas blockbusters in remote areas found breeding birds on territory before migrants of those same species were noted passing in traditional coastal or lakeshore migration corridors. With some effort, you can note that many Adirondack arrival dates coincide with or even precede more southerly or westerly migrant arrival dates. Interesting! Before you rush away now, properly relieved by a neat explanation, I don't buy this as the complete story. Personally, in the breeding season, in lots of atlasng hours here and in the midwest, I wandered through too many large tracts of varied habitat types with far too little birdsong. Maybe we ought to be doing more thinking and discussing of impressions with fellow birders and others concerned.

Turning to the spring's passage of major groups of birds, we find notes of interest in nearly all. Beginning as usual with loons, grebes, and waterfowl, a warm spell in February started their movement early and a warm March resulted in few lingering concentrations, except for Canada Geese. An indication of the numbers of geese may be garnered

from 500+ and 183 collared individuals logged in Regions 2 and 6, respectively, less than 1% of the totals present. Red-throated Loons were very scarce. Good Red-necked Grebe counts were recorded in Regions 2 and 9. Greater White-fronted Geese continued their increased appearances of recent years with sightings in Regions 1, 2, 5, and 9. Last fall's Connecticut grouping of three Barnacle Geese and a "Richardson's" Goose appeared in Region 2 in mid-March and tarried thru most of April. Snow Goose numbers were reported good in six regions. Eurasian Wigeon reports are confined to Regions 9 and 10. Most ducks were recorded in typical numbers, best represented by the annual table of peak counts at Montezuma NWR in Region 3. Am. Black Duck, Redhead, and Canvasback are the species of greatest concern. Excepting the bitterns, herons were generally a bit upbeat this spring. Somewhat surprisingly, Region 1 provided the most interesting variety, including: Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Glossy Ibis, and Wood Stork. Tricolored Heron (s?) appeared upstate in Regions 2 and 6 (dates suggesting one bird) and a Little Blue Heron appeared in Region 5. Raptor counts were a bit off this year, summarized in tables for Derby Hill in Region 5 and for banding in Region 2 near Braddock Bay. (The full count continues until June 30 and will be reported next season.) Still, record highs were reported for Broad-winged Hawk, 11,200 on 21 April and 18,500 on 22 April, and Turkey Vulture, 1891 and 433 on 6 April at both Braddock Bay and Derby Hill, respectively. Note that high counts were reported also in Regions 1 and 7 in the 21 April to 22 April time period. Numbers for the scarcer, regular raptors, eagles, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon, did not vary significantly from those of other recent years. Only Rough-legged Hawk was truly low, in keeping with their scarcity all winter. Sandhill Cranes were again reported, in Regions 1, 2, and 5 this year, a lakeshore movement of probably fewer birds than the number of reports. Shorebirds provided little to highlight this season with numbers generally poor in all inland regions, with only a few dates a bit earlier than average, and the only significant highs in records were for Solitary Sandpiper-60 on 19 May in Region 9 and Ruddy Turnstone-542 on 16 May in Region 10. Rarities included only a Willet in Region 5, Ruffs in Regions 2 and 5, and Wilson's Phalaropes in six regions. Again, with lots of leg work, observers turned up a good variety in most regions so that a season's check-only list wouldn't look too bad. Of interest to many will be the fact that the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge shorebird survey is continuing under Arthur Morris. Gulls and terns were generally low, except for a massive invasion of Ring-billed Gulls in Region 2 late in the season and good numbers in Region 7 on the breeding islands. In the latter case, note details of the world's largest color marking project in the

Region 7 report. Can you even imagine individually counting 16,329 active nests, much less spreading dye in each and every one? Other highlights in the group include: a Laughing Gull in Region 1, Little Gulls in Regions 2, 9, and 10, and Thayer's Gull in Regions 2 and 5. Terns are of note mainly in their absence. Very low numbers of Black Terns are flagged in several regions. Cuckoos were very scarce from all regions except the current Gypsy Moth center in Region 3. Owls did not receive much attention this spring; only one Common Barn-Owl was reported, a migrant in Region 2, and the numbers of Long-eared and Northern Saw-Whets banded were off a bit in Region 5. Both normally widespread goatsuckers appear to be in trouble in our state, as there was no really encouraging news for Common Nighthawk and Whip-poor-will. They were red-flagged as very low in six of the seven regions noting them at all.

Moving along to the passerines, the general picture was provided earlier. Looking a bit more closely, species which normally arrive about 1 May were often located in small numbers a week or two early, *e.g.* lots of April warbler arrivals. Normally later arrivals were often later yet, *e.g.* cuckoos and flycatchers and the later warblers, and generally their numbers were reported as low. Except for the many slightly late arrivals, flycatchers were not notable for any significant trends. In contrast with this late theme, a record early Eastern Wood-Pewee was located on 13 April in Region 3. A good American Crow total is provided from Derby Hill; other hawkwatches probably could add a line or two for the likes of crows, robins, and jays to be noted during the duller hawkwatching periods or as something constructive for extra people to do on mob days. A couple of early breeding notes are Common Raven feeding young on 21 March in Region 7, and a record early White-breasted Nuthatch fledgling on 23 May in Region 10. Wren trends include very few reports for Carolina Wren for most regions, only *one* Sedge Wren for the entire state, and a low Winter Wren note from Region 5. Among the thrushes we see cautious optimism for Eastern Bluebird from several regions, but notes of very low counts for Gray-cheeked, Swainson's, and Hermit Thrushes from widespread locations. This year's reports are not mitigated by any reports of the keen ears of our night-owl observers picking up waves passing in the night in May. Are we soon to lose Loggerhead Shrike completely? Migrants were reported only from Regions 3 and 5 this season, only one and three reports, respectively. From the vireos, note White-eyed reports from Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, and 9, and a record early Philadelphia in Region 2. Among the warblers, one might compare arrival dates across the state, noting similarities and differences, then speculating on the origins, whether migration patterns or observer activity. Note the banding

summaries, especially in Region 7. Record early dates include: Tennessee Warbler on 25 April in Region 1, Blackpoll Warbler on 3 May in Region 7, and Black-and-white Warbler on 20 March in Region 9. The only record high count is 1100 Yellow-rumped Warblers in Region 5 on 5 May, the best migration date of the season for several regions. Rarities included Yellow-throated Warblers in Regions 4 and 10, at least 11 Kentucky Warblers, and Connecticut Warblers in Region 2. Going through the rest of the list, we note American Tree Sparrow departure dates quite uniform across the state, in the 20-30 April range, three male Lark Buntings in Region 5, grassland sparrows generally a bit better, Henslow's still very local with colonies popping up or disappearing in several regions, Yellow-headed Blackbirds in Regions 5 and 10, Brewer's Blackbirds in Regions 1 and 2 (who will find the first nest?), the continued saga of the crossbills and siskins, with breeding confirmed in Regions 3, 4, 5, and 7 and appearances noted in all regions except Region 10, and finally, last, and here even least, we have Evening Grosbeak still very low or missing from all but Regions 4 and 7. Overall, there were no glaring misses this season.

Most of the special comments from the editorial sections of the regional reports which especially appealed to me have been woven in above, but Harriet Marsi in Region 4's report has a few more which I must call to your attention. There you will find the tale of a turkey hunter hit twice by a goshawk, of a Purple Finch, crown raised, drumming like a grouse, and the unhappy story of a flock of Bonaparte's Gulls tangling with a power line. What is the toll of our machines and structures on birds? It might be interesting for many of us to keep a tally of all the birds we see killed over a season by cars, windows, towers, lines, etc. and pass this along to the regional editors with our quarterly reports and comments. A little more hard data wouldn't hurt.

Again we close the story on another season with the rarity report for those special birds not mentioned earlier. By region we have: Region 1—Mississippi Kite; Region 2—Eared Grebe and the same Mississippi Kite a day later; Region 3—Kentucky Warbler and Clay-colored Sparrow; Region 4—Prothonotary Warbler; Region 5—Swainson's Hawk and Stilt Sandpiper; Region 7—Red-throated Loon and Clay-colored Sparrow; Region 9—Black Vulture; and Region 10—Western Grebe, Gyrfalcon, Purple Gallinule, Black-necked Stilt, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Painted Bunting. In addition to the abundance of rarities just noted, Region 10 also carries off the BOTS Award with a Bridled Tern on 29 May, even in the absence of major storm activity this season.

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