

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

ROBERT SPAHN

Once again we find such terms as lackluster and dull used to describe the fall migration. Peterson's "The most significant migratory movement of the season was lepidopteran, — —" was appropriate in most regions, if only they too would have had the butterflies to watch. After five years of the same lament, one begins to wonder if there ever were times when the fall passage approached expectations. Again, much of the blame can be laid to the fact that there were few weather systems to produce the sharp changes which lead to groundings of migrant birds. For most of the state, September and October were relatively dry and warm, and November was moderate in temperature but wet and gloomy. Typically, the first frost dates were a bit late and there was little snowfall through season's end. The weather event of the season was Hurricane Gloria. It brought great birding to Region 10, and had little impact elsewhere in the state except for bringing heavy rain on 27-28 Sep. The very local nature of this storm's effects on birds shows in that, even in neighboring Region 9, the only notable fallout was a single Northern Fulmar.

Generally speaking, for most regions and across most avian families, the story for this fall was of good variety but poor numbers. These poor numbers are reflected in notes of low TV tower kills where they have been monitored in Regions 1 and 3, and in low banding totals from Regions 1 and 4. The single major exception to this story was the avian aftermath of Hurricane Gloria's passage over eastern Long Island.

The greater part of the Region 10 report is devoted to this Event of the Season, so I will not go to great lengths here, but strongly urge your study of that report. It was interesting that few sea birds were blown in aside from a few storm-petrels, a frigatebird, and a multitude of terns of several species. One of the more fascinating occurrences was the large number of grounded and exhausted land birds on the eastern end of Long Island after the storm, leading to such state high counts as 150 Black-throated Blue Warblers, 2000-3000 American Redstarts, and 3000+ Cape May Warblers. Of added interest is the note that a large proportion of these warblers were adults. This suggested that the storm had intercepted and pushed back part of a large movement of warblers from over the ocean, the route taken by the adults as opposed to the coastal route typically followed by the young of the year.

Numbers reported for the regular flights are dominated by the general feeling of scarcity noted above. However, there are highlights of interest

in each. Among the loons and grebes, we find a new state high count for Common Loon in Region 2 and the synchronous arrival of Red-necked Grebe in Regions 1, 2, and 3. The waterfowl produced good counts of Canada Goose, but most other species, and particularly many puddle ducks, were way down. A good illustration is the contrast this fall in the table of peak waterfowl counts from Montezuma NWR in Region 3 with those published in the previous two fall summaries. Numbers for Mallard, Black Duck, and Pintail are down by factors approaching 10. In contrast high counts for Wood Duck came from Region 5 and for Hooded Merganser from Region 3.

The fall hawk flights were termed good overall. Major counts are summarized in Regions 4, 9, and 10, with a few other notes from Regions 2 and 5. There is widespread feeling that Sharp-shinned Hawk and both Merlin and Peregrine Falcon numbers were good. Bald Eagles seemed to be holding steady over the past several years. Rough-legged Hawks arrived as early as 1 Sep in Region 3 and had appeared in most regions by the season's end, though in low numbers. Region 10 provides an interesting contrast, where one hawk watch reports all-time low numbers, especially for American Kestrel, while the second tallied an all-time high, with American Kestrel up 33% to a new high.

Shorebird highlights include: good variety in most regions, a first Buff-breasted Sandpiper for Clinton Co. in Region 7, and a new high count of 125 American Oystercatchers in Region 10. The gull scene was uninspiring. The high points were Laughing Gulls inland in Regions 1 and 5 and a Regional high count for Little Gull, a Common Black-headed Gull, and a record high count of 1000 Great Black-backed Gulls in Region 6. The annual watch for Snowy Owls was very unrewarding, as the only records were single birds in Regions 5 and 9.

Bright spots in the generally dismal passerine picture include: a late Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in Region 5; Bohemian Waxwings in Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, & 7, including a record early arrival in New York from Region 3; a scattering of Northern Shrikes arriving in October and November in six regions; a lone Loggerhead Shrike report from Region 10; good counts of warblers in Region 10 and also in Region 9; a late Yellow Warbler in Region 2; Yellow-throated Warblers in Region 10 and one very late in Region 3; Connecticut Warblers in five regions; a sparrow contrast, with Region 4 reporting excellent banding numbers and Region 9 good counts for several species, while Region 5 noted their scarcity; and, finally!, a winter finch season with all species except Hoary Redpoll reported and all regions except 7 and 10 noting the prospects of a good finch winter.

As with any season, a few of the species notes fail to fit the major flight pattern. Among those for this season, we have: more evidence

of the large change in the Double-crested Cormorant population since John Bull's *Birds of New York State* in 1974 with new high inland counts of 325 in Region 5 and 400-500 in Region 7. Both of these contrasting with complaints of relatively low numbers in nearby Region 6; late inland "Glossy" Ibis in Regions 2, 3, and 5; an October boat trip to an historical nesting site along Lake Champlain in Region 7 that found both Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon present; a roost of 10,000 + American Crow in Region 9; Common Raven from five regions; note of both House Finch and House Sparrow increasing at one location in Region 6; and three record late observations of birds feeding fledglings – E. Wood-Pewee in Region 9, House Wren in Region 3, and Ovenbird in Region 7.

Typical of most seasons, the Regional Editors' commentaries contain many fascinating items aside from species' data. A sampling to spur you to search for your own follows. From Region 1 we have a call for more education of the general public about raptors, as too many hawks still are being shot. This was echoed in notes from Region 6 of an Osprey found shot and from Region 7's discussion of another Osprey shot and a Golden Eagle and a Barred Owl caught in leghold traps. In Region 5 a Common Raven's croaks led a ranger to an illegal deer kill, and eventually led to an arrest and conviction. In Region 6 birders could not dissuade neighbors from cutting a pine because of its "worm problem," though the problem was only a sapsucker's workings. Region 7 reminds us to search for collared Canada Geese (Spring soon will be in full swing and you too can join the search when you read this), tells of a Pileated Woodpecker feeding on dogwood berries, and we cheer on a Northern Goshawk taking cats for dinner on Crown Point.

In spite of the lack of cooperative weather and the lament over poor numbers, the list of rarities is long again this season. The best of each region include: Region 1 – Laughing Gull and Brewer's Blackbird; Region 2 – Great Cormorant and Marbled Godwit; Region 3 – Yellow-throated Warbler and Dickcissel; Region 4 – Snowy Egret, "Audubon's" Warbler, and Golden Eagle; Region 5 – Glossy Ibis and Long-tailed Jaeger; Region 6 – Yellow Rail and Com. Black-headed Gull; Region 7 – Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Orange-crowned Warbler; Region 9 – Northern Fulmar, Greater White-fronted Goose, Black Skimmer, Western Kingbird, and Brewer's Blackbird; and Region 10 – Eared Grebe, Leach's Storm-Petrel, frigatebird, Sandhill Crane, Sandwich Tern, Arctic Tern, Bridled Tern, Sooty Tern, Burrowing Owl, Say's Phoebe, Western Tanager, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. A very difficult choice this season, the B.O.T.S. Award goes to Region 9's Swainson's Hawk, a second regional record and the first fall record for the state in this century.

716 High Tower Way, Webster, New York 14580

Standard abbreviations: ad-adult; arr-arrival or first of season; j-juvenile; im-immature; max-maximum; mob-multiple observers; NWR-National Wildlife Refuge; NYSARC-report to New York State Avian Records Committee; P-Park; Pd-Pond; ph-photographed, Pt-point; Res-Reservoir; SP-State Park; spm-specimen; subad-subadult; T-Town of; Twn-township; WMA-Wildlife Management Area.

REGION 1 – NIAGARA FRONTIER

STEPHEN W. EATON

The summer drought, broken briefly in the last week of August, continued through September and October. Buffalo recorded the least amount (1.2 inches), of rainfall for September in 21 years, and temperatures reached the 80's on nine days. Lake Erie actually warmed again to 71 degrees on the 7th. Hurricane *Gloria* hardly affected us, leaving a few clouds and light showers in her wake. Most of the month was clear and sunny, not conducive to concentrating migrants.

October was warm and remained dry. The first killing frost at Amity Lake occurred on the night of the second and third but not until 28 October at Buffalo International Airport. Lowest readings for the month were on 29 October: 25 at Buffalo, 13 at Jamestown and 16 at Amity Lake. The streams and ponds remained very low and the soil generally very dry.

November, however, got the streams, ponds and reservoirs back to more normal levels but it took record rainfall to do it. This was the wettest November ever recorded at Buffalo (records since 1871) with 9.75 inches. Only three days in the month lacked less than a trace of precipitation. Temperatures averaged less than two degrees above normal at 42. There were two principal reasons for all this precipitation. Hurricane *Juan* dropped most of the rain during the first part of November. The constant rain in the second half was the result of a front stalled from Texas to the maritimes, bringing up moisture from the Gulf to mix with cold air brought down from the north by a depressed jet stream.

The mild September and October gave us very late departure dates, but no one record late, for many neotropical migrants. There were light kills at TV towers south of Buffalo monitored by Arthur Clark. At Farmersville Station Don Clark banded very few vireos and warblers, continuing to document very poor fall flights through the area. The lack of any great number of low pressure disturbances during September and October probably allowed migrants to overfly the area.

We know of no great numbers of hawks migrating through our Region in the fall but they do move through and they do winter. The most notable hawk to report was an unbanded female (by measurements) Peregrine Falcon which apparently struck a high line during a stoop near Swain and injured ligaments in