

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON

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In contrast to several recent springs, this season's weather generally was warm, pleasant and conducive to birders being afield. As a result many Regions report very good species counts but, almost without exception when any direct comment was made, a dearth of numbers of individuals, especially among the passerines. In the past, these highlights usually have concentrated on the bright spots of the season, with only passing note of the many negatives. This season, I will strive for more balance and I also will include some speculations. I solicit your comments on these ideas.

Seasonal temperatures averaged above normal every month in all Regions. Temperature patterns varied somewhat and patterns of precipitation varied even more. March provided a typical roller coaster pattern. Early to mid month warm spells brought some record early arrival dates, most notably Broad-winged Hawks in Regions 2, 3, 4 and 9; a state record early Lesser Golden-Plover in Region 2; and a Pectoral Sandpiper in Region 5. A warm spell across the whole state at month's end resulted in record hawk flights in Regions 1 and 2 and in another group of Regional early arrivals. April was again seesaw, with some snow the low point in most Regions. The heaviest snow fell between 20 and 23 April in the southeastern Regions. May was generally lovely for people through at least the 18th, then became cool or hot depending on your locale. The uniform bluebird weather may have pushed migrants through with few groundings. Foliage typically about two weeks advanced of normal reduced their visibility in any case.

Positive notes and trends are by far the minority and easier to summarize. Continuing range expansions include Mute Swan inland and westward, reported in six Regions; Turkey Vulture everywhere; Wild Turkey everywhere and with individuals sighted even into the Moose River System in Region 7; Tufted Titmouse and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher north and eastward; and House Finch everywhere. Rarities of increased regularity include Greater White-fronted Goose in Regions 1, 2, 5 and 9; Black Vulture in Regions 2 and 9; Sandhill Crane along the Lake Ontario Plains in Regions 1, 2 and 5, with at least 10 individuals in Region 2 alone; a phenomenal count of 67 Common Raven in Region 7; Yellow-throated Warbler back where they nested in 1984 in Region 1 and also in Region 2; and both Yellow-headed and Brewer's Blackbird in Regions 1 and 2. The latter two species probably will soon be found nesting in New York as they continue to spread eastward. Additional

bright spots include increased numbers of Double-crested Cormorant inland, including a very high count from Region 5, probably associated with the large breeding colony on Little Galloo Island in eastern Lake Ontario; a widespread increase in Ring-necked Duck numbers; a new Bald Eagle nesting pair in Region 1 and another pair courting in Region 3, plus increased sightings of migrant birds; a local jump in migrant owls in Region 2; a cautious report of increased Whip-poor-will numbers in Region 9, in sharp contrast with the other Regions; Ring-billed Gull numbers up, especially in Region 6; a small jump in Sedge Wren numbers from the western Regions; a general increase in kinglets; positive comments on Eastern Bluebird populations from several Regions; and increased sightings of Prothonotary and Kentucky Warblers, though again with sharp contrasts between neighboring Regions.

Let us now turn to the much longer list of negatives. In some cases whole families are flagged. Waterfowl generally migrated early and rapidly, perhaps due to the early warm weather. Were they also driven from Lake Ontario resting areas by the hordes of boats that plied these waters as a result of this nice weather? Shorebirds had little habitat in most Regions. Region 4 reported good habitat but few birds, while there were state high counts of some species, notably Pectoral Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs and Solitary Sandpiper, from Region 2 thanks to the work of Frank Nicoletti, the Braddock Bay hawk count compiler. Terns of all species were scarce, as were cuckoos (except in some gypsy moth areas), owls and goatsuckers. Several species of flycatchers (possibly mitigated by late arrivals), swallows (even including Tree Swallow!) and thrushes (even including Wood Thrush!) were similarly flagged. Warbler reports varied across Regions with many sharp contrasts in preceptions. Finally, the grassland sparrows, in trouble for years mostly likely due to habitat loss and to conflicting and changing patterns of land use such as noted in Region 9, continue to do poorly.

Besides these families, many species had downward trends or have been flagged in several Regions. Among those to watch are both loons, Pied-billed Grebe, both bitterns, Green-backed Heron, Snow Goose (except for a tight migration corridor in Regions 3 and 9?), Brant (only reported in Region 9), Ring-necked Pheasant, Upland Sandpiper, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Marsh Wren, Loggerhead Shrike (too low for a comeback now?), Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Lincoln's Sparrow and Purple Finch (at times its decrease tentatively linked to the increase in House Finch). An obvious common thread for many of these species is habitat loss, sometimes with speculation on the effects of habitat loss on their wintering grounds as well. For some, not much is really known.

This year more than most springs that I recall, there are sharp contrasts in the impressions voiced for some species or groups among neighboring species, or even between sites within a Region. In Region 7 the migration pattern depended on elevation, the higher the better this season. In Region 9 warblers moved up the Harlem Valley but not the Hudson Valley on opposite sides of the same county on the same day, 17 May. Seasonal banding totals were way up in Region 2 but down in Region 7. A large Great Egret count in Region 1 was not echoed in the neighboring Regions. Hawk-watch totals were very high in Regions 1 and 2 but mediocre in Region 5, a reverse of the norm. Palm, Canada and Wilson's Warbler were common in Region 2 but flagged as very low in adjacent Regions 1 and 3. Connecticut Warbler, typically a more westerly migrant, was banded in Regions 2 and 5 on 16-17 May but first noted on 4 May in Region 9. Is a multitude of such contrasts really the norm? Have patterns of migration always been so local? Does this reflect an increase in observers who provide more opportunities to detect these contrasts, or that fewer observers are willing to contribute their observations? It is unfortunate that reports from Regions 8 and 10 are again lacking. Were some of the species missing from the western Regions present in better numbers there, or were these negative trends seen everywhere? What do you think?

Not to end on a negative note, there were a few more bright spots. High counts included 15,000+ Blue Jay on 16 May in Region 2, 13,000+ Am. Crow on 13 Mar in Region 2 and 7240 on 15 Mar in Region 5, 15 Pileated Woodpecker in Region 4, 2700 Yellow-rumped Warbler in Region 5, and a good count of eight Am. Bittern in Region 8. Record early dates were obtained for fledged young Hooded Merganser in Region 1, Least Bittern, Sedge Wren and Nashville Warbler in Region 2, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in Region 5, and Yellow-rumped Warbler in Region 7. There were record late departure dates for migrant Evening Grosbeak in Region 2 and 5, the end of a huge May movement noted across the state. Bohemian Waxwing lingered over a month later than ever before in Region 6. Other interesting notes include the progress of Bald Eagle and Osprey hacking efforts and April census results in Region 1, notes on rarer raptors in Region 2, an Am. Crow fishing(!) in Region 4, a Hoary Redpoll specimen and a discussion of "wettervögel" and "instinktvögel" in Region 6, the gull colony report in Region 7, and a hybrid Dark-eyed Junco x White-throated Sparrow in Region 9.

This season's rarity list is the best in several years, except for the absence of Region 10 report. The best of the lot (not mentioned above) are: Region 1—Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, two King Rail, a first inland American Oystercatcher (almost BOTS), and Laughing Gull;

Region 2—Am. White Pelican, Little Blue Heron, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, a male Cinnamon x Blue-winged Teal, three Swainson's Hawk, Am. Swallow-tailed Kite, Ruff, Thayer's Gull, Arctic Tern, two Boreal Owl, and Clay-colored Sparrow; Region 4—Black-crowned Night-Heron, Merlin and Fish Crow; Region 5—Parasitic Jaeger, Glossy Ibis, Fish Crow and Clay-colored Sparrow; Region 6—Cattle Egret and Blue-winged Warbler; Region 7—Orchard Oriole and Hoary Redpoll; Region 9—Little Blue Heron, Am. Swallow-tailed Kite, Chukar and Summer Tanager. The BOTS award was easy this season. It must go to the state's first Black-chinned Hummingbird, a male seen and well described in the town of Huron, Wayne County, in Region 2.

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Standard abbreviations: counties are shortened to their first four letters, months to their first three; !—details seen by Regional Editor; ad—adult; arr—arrival; f—female; I—Island; im—immature; L—lake; m—male; max—maximum; mob—multiple observers; NWR—National Wildlife Refuge; NYSARC—report to New York State Avian Record Committee; Pd—Pond; ph—photographed; Pt—Point; R—River; Rd—Road; Res—Reservoir; SP—State Park; subad—subadult; Twn—Township; WMA—Wildlife Management Area; y—young.