

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Out of the Eye of the Storm: Hurricane Gloria roared across Long Island the morning of September 27, 1985. Gloria's massive winds downed power lines and trees, smashed into homes and businesses, and created havoc along its path. As soon as it subsided and it seemed safe, Sy Schiff and I were on our way to Jones Beach to see if any exotic birds had been blown ashore. After previous hurricanes, Sandwich, Sooty, Black, and Bridled Terns had been seen at the West End of Jones Beach, and we had hopes of seeing some of these wind blown vagrants.

As we approached Meadowbrook Parkway, we had our first glimpse of something unusual. Dozens of Chimney Swifts were flying by in a westerly direction and in a constant stream. Proceeding down the parkway to the Jones Beach Causeway, we encountered a gigantic swirling mass of birds. More birds were concentrated in one area than we had ever seen before. They were all over the road, sitting in the grass and on the roadside, milling in the air, and descending into the nearby bushes. As far as the eye could see, there were birds in flight or sitting exhausted on the ground. Cape May Warblers in vivid colors reminiscent of Spring plumage were to be seen in the thousands. Two or three thousand Bobolink, moving down the strip in groups of ten to twenty, dove into any bush or unoccupied patch of grass they could find. The ground was also filled with Redstarts in every plumage. Many of the birds were so tired that we were able to pick them up and carry them to protected spots.

We joined Manny Levine at the Coast Guard Station Marina. He pointed out an Avocet and two Marbled Godwit, and Royal and Caspian Terns on a small island across from the Marina. Earlier, he had seen a Mourning Warbler, but we could not locate it. Moving on, we found two Worm-eating Warblers and a Connecticut Warbler in a small group of pines.

Birds were constantly streaming by and we could not keep up with all of them. We found three Cattle Egrets and five Snowy Egrets huddled in nearby pines. Merlin and Sharp-shinned Hawks darted through the air and had easy pickings on the tired birds scattered before them. Black-throated Blue Warblers were scattered throughout as were Northern Waterthrush. Pectoral Sandpipers flew by in small flocks. They rested briefly and then moved on as more of their kind came in to take their place. The air was completely filled with birds fluttering around, looking for a shelter to recover from their ordeal. Many of the birds that settled on the road were run over by cars as they were too exhausted to move out of harm's way.

As the light started to fade, we moved more rapidly from place to place, finding new species with each move. As darkness came, we made our way home. We had all seen a spectacle none of us had ever seen or envisioned before: thousands upon thousands of birds in an area not more than a half mile in length. We could only hope that most of these birds would find their way safely back to wherever they had been before Gloria scooped them up and deposited them on our small patch of beach. We never did see the exotic terns we had come to see, but we had an experience in those few hours we would surely never forget or possibly ever see again.

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