

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

ROBERT SPAHN

Many of you may be wondering about the impact of the drought of '88 on this summer's breeding season. To dispense with that quickly, it had few effects on bird populations but was responsible for very low activity by birders during the hot spells in the middle of the season. Several Regions noted specifically that the rains came in time to save the berry crops and many stressed trees appeared to put forth a bumper crop of seeds. It may have little negative impact through this winter as well. In fact, from the standpoint of weather, our new Region 10 editors summarize it best: "... in actuality [it] wound up being pretty much just a hotter than average summer in terms of temperature and rainfall." From the standpoint of birding, the two migrations which are partly included in this season's reports were both lackluster and reports of breeding birds ranged from encouraging to continuing trends to a few new negatives. Most of the more extreme variations, positive or negative, were reported only very locally.

In a year of widespread drought across the country, we also appeared to be headed for the same. However, heavy rains in the latter halves of July and August brought the summer back to near normal precipitation totals in most of the state. Weather systems were mainly large and stable, so most of the state saw the same pattern: cool and damp for about half of June, **hot** from mid June to mid August with heavy showers and thunderstorms in the last half of July, and cool and wet in late August. Much of the rainfall occurred as locally heavy storms, with wide variation between close locales. There were very few notes of this weather appearing to have much effect on breeding success. In Region 1 landbird success in June and July was thought to be down and raccoon predation increased as a result the drought conditions. In Region 2 birds of wet woodlands were thought to have suffered, and in Region 7 Osprey nesting success was poor and several nesting attempts by Bald Eagles failed, although both problems have other possible explanations. Failure of Bald Eagle nesting is echoed in Regions 3 and 9.

Since this reporting season includes the end of spring migration, the heart of the breeding season, and the start of fall migration, I'll treat each of these events in turn rather than following checklist sequence and mixing the seasonal comments. The late spring migration was very uneventful over most of the state. The major highlight was the spring shorebird peak at Jamaica Bay on June 1 instead of in May. The few migrants specifically noted in early June were species which often linger into June. Only a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher on 21 Jun in Region 1 seemed

exceptionally late.

The bulk of the reports deal with breeding species. In spite of the paucity of observers afield and the early ending of song (owing to the heat?) there is much interesting information. Read the Regional Breeding Bird Census summary in Region 1, the waterfowl nesting report in Region 3, the summary of Breeding Bird Survey results in Region 5, reports of new locations covered in Regions 3, 6 and 8, the annual Four Brothers Islands banding report in Region 7 as well as other banding results from Regions 7 and 8, and the generally upbeat report from Region 9. Waterfowl reports were mixed with some species, such as Am. Black Duck and Blue-winged Teal, apparently still in trouble, but others, such as Canada Goose, Wood Duck and Green-winged Teal (note more Green-winged than Blue-winged in Region 3!), increasing. Relatively rare breeding occurrences include Northern Shoveler in Region 1 and Canvasback in Region 7. Raptors, aside from the disturbing Osprey and Bald Eagle notes above, saw positives for Northern Harrier in seven Regions, more Red-shouldered Hawk reports than has been typical of the recent past, widespread accipiter reports though N. Goshawk was scarce, and good nesting success reported for the common species, Red-tailed Hawk and Am. Kestrel. Not much breeding data for the gulls and terns was provided this summer, except that Least Terns were down a bit in Region 10 and Black Tern generally remains very low. Among the late summer wanderers from nearby breeding areas, Caspian Tern numbers were good while Common Tern numbers were very poor. Owls yielded the usual few reports, but Common Barn-Owl breeding records came from Regions 9 and 10 and Short-eared Owls were noted in Regions 1 and 3. For the woodpeckers there was little data as well, except for a positive list from Region 9 and reports that Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers were scarce at the edges of their ranges. Most of our common breeding flycatchers received good reviews if they were noted at all. Olive-sided Flycatcher added a bit of confusion with a 4 Jul appearance in Region 2. Swallow reports also were mostly positive, though red flags were posted for Purple Martin in Region 6, Cliff Swallow in Region 9, and Barn Swallow in Regions 1 and 5. Again the "little data" refrain applies to the wrens, with a plus for Sedge Wren in Regions 1, 5 and 7 offset by Marsh Wren lows in Regions 6 and 9. Thrushes elicited little comment except for Eastern Bluebird, for which a low from Region 5 contrasted to very good fledging reports for major trails of boxes in Regions 1 and 9. Vireo reviews varied between Regions, the most interesting being the increased number of White-eyed Vireo reports in Regions 1, 9 and 10. Data for the wood warblers was again rather sparse and locally variable. Golden-winged Warbler, American Redstart, and Yellow-breasted Chat

received significant calls to watch for declines, while Ovenbird and Common Yellowthroat were noted for strong showings in more than one Region. Our beleaguered grassland sparrows continue to generate much concern, with even Savannah Sparrow now apparently in trouble in many areas. Blackbird data also was sparse but of special note are very low counts Red-winged Blackbird in Region 5 and only one note of Eastern Meadowlark, a species already of some concern statewide. Finally, finches received only a scattering of comments. House Finch is still expanding, while Purple Finch remains scarce everywhere except for the large numbers banded by Robert Yunick at Jenny Lake in Region 8. Most other finches appear as scattered single reports except for Pine Siskin, which lingered late after possibly breeding in several Regions.

Among the breeding species which do not fit neatly into these larger families, we find an apparent Common Loon pair with young in Region 9; Double-crested Cormorant booming - 1000 in Region 7, 830 in Region 5; very few American Bitterns; Green-backed Heron up a bit with positive notes from 4 Regions; Ring-necked Pheasant still scarce; Wild Turkey increasing northward and eastward; cuckoos generally up, especially in Regions 1, 3, 8 and 9; Common Nighthawk and Whip-poor-will still both generally scarce; Chimney Swift good in Regions 3 and 9, low or not mentioned elsewhere; Common Raven noted in seven regions; most southern colonizers such as Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren and N. Mockingbird, doing well; Brown Thrasher red flagged in Regions 3 and 8; Cedar Waxwing sharply contrasting, down in Region 1 and up in Region 9; Loggerhead Shrike noted only in Regions 2 and 6, with one seen lying on a road in Region 6 later found injured on that same road; Indigo Bunting down in Regions 1 and 6, good in Region 9; and White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco each red flagged in one region. Rarer summering or breeding reports included up to 31 Brown Pelicans in Region 10 virtually all season; a late June Eurasian Wigeon in Region 10; Spruce Grouse in Regions 6 and 7; Fish Crow in Regions 8 and 9 but not found in Region 3; the state's first Dickcissel nest since 1955 in Region 1; and Boat-tailed Grackle numbers increasing in Region 10. We could make much more sense of the breeding season if more attempts were made to relate a given year's Breeding Bird Survey results (or some similar compilation) to a long-term average, such as the prior 10 or 24 years of BBS data. One can obtain summaries for all the routes in a Region and one would hope that all route observers would be happy to send copies of their data each year to the Regional Editors, if there was a feeling that these data would be used.

The start of the fall migration seemed nearly as dismal as the end of the spring's movement. Shorebirds again provided the most interesting notes, with very high counts of Black-bellied Plover and Willet in Region

10 and good habitat bringing interesting variety to several other Regions. Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, dowitcher and phalarope numbers appeared somewhat low through season's end. At Jamaica Bay, July numbers were above average, August numbers below. Pelagic birds were also scarce offshore from Region 10. Away from Region 10, wandering post-breeding herons, expected in late July and August, simply failed to appear in most Regions. Great Egret was the only widespread species and the other, rarer species were noted only in Regions 1, 3, 9 and 10. Landbird migrants rated no significant comments for either arrival dates or numbers, other than being scarce - a fact probably significant in itself.

In a season noted for its paucity of good rarities, this summer did provide some interesting surprises, though no sign of a flood of travelers from the parched West. The best of the rare bird reports by region were: Region 1 - Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, American Avocet, Laughing Gull, a third summer record of Scissor-tailed Flycatcher for the state, and the nesting Dickcissel; Region 2 - Willet, Marbled Godwit, and Common Raven; Region 3 - Glossy Ibis; Region 5 - Kentucky Warbler; Region 6 - Spruce Grouse; Region 7 - nesting Canvasback, Sedge Wren, and Palm Warbler; and Region 10 - Manx Shearwater, Brown Pelican, Great Cormorant, White Ibis, Eurasian Wigeon, and a possible Violet-green Swallow. Many of these are very rare or casual in New York and would be BOTS species in another year or if reported with more detail. The BOTS Award for this summer goes to the state's first verified Rufous Hummingbird, a male in Region 3.

In closing, it is good to see a Region 10 report once again; a warm welcome to the new editors, Seymour Schiff and Alvin Wollin. Accompanying this season's report they have provided a brief survey of the highlights of that Region's missing seasons. Only the Region 4 report failed to arrive in time to be included in this season's highlights; can we see 100% next season?.

716 High Tower Way, Webster, New York 14580

Standard abbreviations: county names are shortened to their first four letters and appear in UPPER CASE; months are shortened to their first three letters; ad - adult; arr - arrival or first of season; BBS - Breeding Bird Survey; FL - fledgling; FY - adult feeding young; I - Island; imm - immature; *intro* - see introduction to report; j - juvenile; L - Lake; 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; y - young.