

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON

ROBERT SPAHN

The Fall of 1988 again brought a migration season ranging from lackluster to downright poor. The diversity of species was good statewide and some local counts of individuals were reasonably good, but variety and counts generally were poor in most localities and over most families of birds. Again, we may speculate about possible impact of the lack of well-defined weather fronts, the cooling and lowered light levels from the passage of smoke from the Yellowstone fires, the early summer drought, or the lack of observers afield in several Regions, but in the end we have yet another fall report which is very poor relative to those of a decade or more past. From the one banding summary, in Region 3, with enough information to assess the mix of birds, it appears that, at least for those species trapped, it was not a case of widespread breeding failure, as 86% of those banded were hatching year birds.

This Fall's weather patterns were relatively similar across the state. September was generally cool and dry, a pleasant respite from the hot summer in many Regions. October was cold and wet, though nearer average in the eastern half of the state; and November was generally a bit above average for temperatures and below for precipitation, except that Regions 9 and 10 ran a bit cooler and much wetter than the others relative to their norms. Over most of the state there was little snowfall through the season. It is not obvious that these patterns should have generated the season's very early departure dates and near total lack of late half hardies. The wild food crop was noted as exceptionally good by several observers, perhaps a surprise for a Fall following a drought period, but there are reports in the literature of stressed plants producing bumper crops of fruits and nuts. The Region 1 report contains some interesting observations of various species using the beechnut crop.

The major fall flights certainly indicate a lack of birds, shifts in the migration patterns, no groundings, a significant reduction in observers reporting, or some combination of these. The passage of loons and grebes, tracked mostly along the Lake Ontario shore, saw below average peak counts for all species. There were virtually no wandering herons, with only one late Cattle Egret report from Region 5, a Glossy Ibis in Region 1 and a late departing Green-backed Heron in Region 1 of special note. The waterfowl picture was the gloomiest since I have been following or reporting data in New York (over 20 years). Numbers were low for many puddle ducks and most divers, especially so for Am. Black Duck, N. Pintail, Redhead, and scaup. In addition, there were no good counts of Tundra Swan, Brant reports were few and low, and even Canada Goose numbers were reported low in several Regions. The only

really bright spots were large Wood Duck counts in Regions 3 and 5, a record high Ring-necked Duck peak in Region 3, and reports of Greater White-fronted Goose from Regions 1, 2, 5, 6 and 10. The raptor picture looks a bit better. The common, resident species were noted as present in good numbers. Hawk watch totals were down a bit for most species in Region 9's tables, but the Region 10 report suggested good numbers for the shore watches, including increases for Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, N. Goshawk, and Peregrine Falcon. Additional notes on hawk watches include a comment on Wescotts Beach State Park in Region 6, a summary for the Pinnacle watch in Region 8, and commentary from Region 10 on the different mix of species at the various shore watches. It was also good to see that hawkwatchers can tune to other species, at least in Region 10, with a Yellow Rail noted at the Fire Island Hawk Watch and a flight of woodpeckers tallied there one October day when hawks were slow. Returning to the raptors, Turkey Vulture numbers and late records continue to increase, Osprey reports were fewer, and N. Goshawk and Red-shouldered Hawk remain scarce. In the Region 4 report, with no organized hawk watches to summarize, you will find several interesting notes on raptor behaviors observed.

The shorebird pattern is like the above, overall diversity good but counts mostly low. Plover numbers, except for Killdeer, were low in most Regions. Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, and Sanderling were relatively scarce. Most "peep" counts were low, and only Region 3 recorded the typical large numbers of Dunlin. Dowitcher counts were low. The only real positives were a good count of Greater Yellowlegs in Region 1, a record late date for Hudsonian Godwit in Region 2, and a good count of Am. Oystercatchers in Region 10. Of special concern are the low numbers of late migrants, suggesting few immatures, this echoing comments I heard from people who visited parts of the Arctic this summer. This paucity is tempered in the case of Region 10 by water level changes which inundated much prime shorebird habitat at Jamaica Bay after mid October. The center of the state's gull activity was split between Region 1, with 13 species recorded in the Niagara Falls area, and Region 6, with 11 species in the Robert Moses Power Dam area. Elsewhere, numbers and rarities were scarce. Of special note were jaegers noted in four Upstate Regions, and Laughing Gull inland in Regions 1, 2, and 3. Tern counts were generally low away from the coast, with the only noteworthy reports the 26 Forster's Terns in Region 9 and the 200 Common Terns in Region 5. From Region 10 we have good counts for Forster's Tern, Royal Tern, and Black Skimmer, and a single report of Gull-billed Tern.

Among the passerines, nearly all species departed early from all parts of the state and very few reports of high counts were noted. Reciting

the litany, we have low counts for most flycatchers, swallows relatively scarce and gone early, thrushes except for Am. Robin and E. Bluebird all departing nearly two weeks early, vireo reports very low, most warbler counts low and 16 of 20 species in the departure date table gone by dates averaging about 10 days early, most sparrows scarce except in Region 10 where the best Fall sparrow flight in many years occurred, and several blackbird species flagged as below normal in numbers. Given this dismal account, it was interesting to read of increases for several species (Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, and N. Mockingbird) at the northern edges of their ranges, and to find state record late departure dates for Whip-poor-will in Region 10, N. Rough-winged Swallow in Region 1, Golden-winged Warbler in Region 7 and Blackburnian Warbler in Region 6. Record late dates inland in New York for Ruby-throated Hummingbird in Region 1, Least Flycatcher in Region 9 and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher in Region 2 also were set. In addition, there were very late dates for adults feeding young by N. Mockingbird and Scarlet Tanager in Region 9. Finally, the irruptive species we all await in the Fall simply failed to appear, *en masse*. Among the winter raptors, both Rough-legged Hawk and Snowy Owl were scarce. Only Short-eared Owl concentrations were good in some Regions. Red-breasted Nuthatch and chickadees didn't move in large numbers, N. Shrike reports were few, and Bohemian Waxwing was unreported. And, last on the list, winter finches failed to appear in significant numbers anywhere in the state. Even Evening Grosbeak was very scarce or missing from all regions.

This dismal picture is little changed if we consider the other species often monitored at this season. Starting with the positive side, Double-crested Cormorant numbers continue very high inland; there was a good count for Chimney Swift in Region 1; Common Raven occurred in five Regions besides Region 7; Winter Wren and both kinglets were found in good numbers; Orange-crowned Warbler was reported in typical fall numbers; Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, and Black-throated Green warblers appeared in good numbers in at least some Regions; Pine and Prairie warblers occurred in more Regions than usual for the fall; and "Oregon" Dark-eyed Junco was recorded in Regions 2 and 9. On the opposite side of the ledger Ring-necked Pheasant remains scarce; Am. Coot numbers were very low; Common Nighthawk maxima over 100 were reported only from Regions 1 and 2; Red-headed Woodpecker reports were few; Olive-sided Flycatcher was very scarce except in passage through Regions 9 and 10; the sole report of Loggerhead Shrike occurred in Region 10; and Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Indigo Bunting were all scarce. In general, banding reports were fewer than usual and numbers, where noted, were down; see the reports

from Regions 3, 4, and 7 for more details.

In addition to these notes on numbers and dates, there are many other interesting tidbits scattered through the Regional reports. Among those I found were: from Region 1, ponder whether providing special food for a late hummingbird was an aid or a trap? Banders in Region 2 netted the second intergrade flicker in as many years. In Region 3 we had the season's only reported albino, a N. Mockingbird. The Region 4 report provides a good example of weaving a recent historical perspective as an integral part of most of the records noted. The Region 6 report prompts us again to consider the possible link between increasing House Finch and decreasing Purple Finch numbers. In the Region 7 report we have the story of a Bald Eagle shot as a 'goose or duck' perched in a tree. Region 9's report notes the continued success of a Dutchess Co. bluebird trail with numbers fledged and banded. Finally, in Region 10 we have a pelican over Manhattan making the early morning traffic 'copter report. Several Regions note a scarcity of reporters or reports this fall. This is a chronic problem in the Regions with low population densities and a periodic one elsewhere. It can only improve *The Kingbird's* Regional reports if visitors to different Regions, as well as residents, would provide timely reports to the appropriate Regional Editors. Addresses are listed at the end of each report. [Amen! *The Editor*]

A summary of the Fall Departure Table for 1988 is relatively easy. Compared with the 25-year average departure dates, 41 of the 62 species left significantly early, that is, more than 2 standard deviations early relative to their long term average. Another 4 were very nearly as early in departing. Among these, the thrushes tabulated departed nearly two weeks early, the vireos 10 days early, the warblers 1-2 weeks early, the swallows 2 weeks early and flycatcher departures were normal to 2 weeks early. The only warbler averaging late was Blue-winged but its average was biased by a very late report from in Region 2. Only 6 species had late average departure dates this year, and among these only Rufous-sided Towhee averaged significantly but questionably late, as at least two of the very late dates may represent birds attempting to overwinter. There is simply no question that nearly all species departed early this year. This is reinforced in the Seasonality column of Table 2, which compares the overall average departure dates Region by Region with each Region's 27-year average. All Regions except Region 4 were more than two standard deviations early.

The comparison of the Regional averages with the grand average over all Regions for this Fall is in the Advance column of Table 2. The pattern of Advancement is as expected. The north country empties first and the regions farthest south and west last. The pattern is generally

Fall Departures 1988

Species	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6	Region 7	Region 8	Region 9	Region 10	Average
Osprey	24 Oct	27 Sep	10 Oct	29 Oct	8 Oct		17 Nov		4 Nov	14 Nov	24 Oct
Broad-winged Hawk	16 Oct	25 Aug	14 Sep	24 Sep	11 Sep		5 Oct	16 Sep	20 Oct	13 Oct	25 Sep
Black-bellied Plover		11 Nov	27 Sep		12 Nov				26 Sep		19 Oct
Semipalmated Plover	15 Oct	27 Oct	25 Oct		16 Oct					9 Oct	18 Oct
Greater Yellowlegs	8 Nov	27 Oct	27 Oct	24 Sep	19 Nov	29 Sep	7 Nov	10 Oct	8 Oct		21 Oct
Lesser Yellowlegs	29 Oct	28 Oct	10 Nov	25 Oct	30 Oct	4 Aug	9 Aug		2 Nov		9 Oct
Spotted Sandpiper	16 Oct	23 Sep	18 Sep	15 Sep	23 Sep	26 Sep	15 Sep		8 Oct	17 Sep	24 Sep
Sanderling		23 Oct	10 Nov		12 Nov		30 Aug				19 Oct
Semipalmated Sandpiper		29 Oct	15 Sep		27 Oct		23 Jul		16 Oct	22 Oct	1 Oct
Least Sandpiper		10 Oct	29 Oct	30 Aug	19 Sep		25 Jul			8 Sep	14 Sep
Pectoral Sandpiper	3 Nov	11 Nov	24 Oct	28 Oct	30 Oct		7 Nov		28 Oct	22 Oct	30 Oct
Caspian Tern	5 Sep	25 Sep	21 Sep		9 Oct					8 Oct	25 Sep
Common Tern	16 Nov	4 Sep			29 Oct				5 Nov	11 Nov	25 Oct
Black Tern	17 Oct	21 Aug			18 Aug		8 Jul			30 Sep	31 Aug
Chimney Swift	15 Oct	8 Oct	3 Sep	25 Sep	9 Sep	7 Sep		12 Sep	10 Oct	21 Sep	22 Sep
Ruby-thr. Hummingbird	25 Sep	16 Sep	24 Sep	19 Sep	15 Sep		29 Sep	24 Sep	1 Oct	20 Oct	25 Sep
Eastern Wood-Pewee	18 Sep	13 Sep	24 Sep	25 Sep	25 Sep	8 Sep	11 Sep		21 Sep	7 Oct	20 Sep
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	22 Sep	16 Sep		6 Sep	15 Sep				27 Sep	15 Sep	16 Sep
Least Flycatcher	19 Sep	18 Sep	25 Sep	24 Sep	12 Sep	2 Sep	6 Aug	16 Sep	5 Oct		14 Sep
Eastern Phoebe	6 Nov	16 Oct	17 Oct	12 Oct	16 Oct	9 Oct	6 Oct		10 Oct	4 Nov	17 Oct
Great Crested Flycatcher	8 Sep	24 Sep	11 Sep	11 Sep	12 Sep		1 Sep		10 Sep	27 Sep	13 Sep
Eastern Kingbird	16 Oct	5 Oct	11 Sep	14 Sep	15 Sep	3 Sep	21 Sep		7 Sep	25 Sep	19 Sep
Tree Swallow	11 Oct	24 Oct	10 Oct	11 Sep	31 Oct	18 Sep	7 Sep	13 Sep	28 Sep		30 Sep
Barn Swallow	30 Sep	5 Oct	30 Sep	17 Sep	25 Sep	5 Sep	3 Sep	4 Sep	17 Sep	14 Nov	24 Sep
House Wren	1 Oct	24 Sep	7 Oct	9 Oct	28 Sep	14 Oct	27 Sep	4 Oct	16 Sep	19 Oct	2 Oct
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	2 Sep	1 Dec	2 Sep	14 Sep	5 Sep				14 Sep	25 Aug	17 Sep
Veery	24 Sep	7 Oct	27 Sep	10 Sep	11 Sep	6 Sep	31 Aug	10 Sep	7 Sep	22 Sep	15 Sep
Swainson's Thrush	24 Sep	14 Oct	16 Sep	10 Oct	9 Oct		8 Oct	4 Oct	3 Oct	13 Oct	4 Oct
Wood Thrush	16 Oct	4 Oct	24 Sep	14 Oct	25 Sep	6 Sep		19 Sep	21 Sep	15 Sep	26 Sep
Gray Catbird	1 Oct	8 Oct	17 Nov	25 Oct	19 Oct	2 Oct	18 Oct		23 Oct		18 Oct
Brown Thrasher	10 Oct	24 Sep	28 Sep	19 Oct	24 Sep		22 Sep	4 Oct	19 Oct		3 Oct

Species	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Region 5	Region 6	Region 7	Region 8	Region 9	Region 10	Average
Solitary Vireo	18 Oct		19 Oct	5 Oct	26 Sep	1 Sep	4 Oct	16 Oct	4 Oct	15 Nov	8 Oct
Yellow-throated Vireo	10 Sep	3 Sep	24 Sep	27 Aug	9 Sep				14 Sep	9 Oct	13 Sep
Warbling Vireo	25 Sep	24 Sep	6 Sep	13 Sep	25 Sep	1 Sep	23 Sep		17 Sep	6 Sep	15 Sep
Red-eyed Vireo	21 Sep	2 Oct	8 Oct	15 Sep	28 Sep	13 Sep	14 Sep		23 Oct	6 Oct	27 Sep
Blue-winged Warbler	17 Sep	20 Oct	10 Sep	5 Sep	18 Aug				6 Sep	18 Sep	13 Sep
Tennessee Warbler	16 Oct	22 Sep	28 Sep	16 Oct	26 Sep	6 Sep		28 Sep	15 Sep	6 Oct	28 Sep
Nashville Warbler	9 Oct	8 Oct	7 Oct	16 Oct	9 Oct		8 Sep		7 Oct	6 Oct	5 Oct
Northern Parula	25 Sep	18 Sep			25 Sep				25 Sep	13 Oct	27 Sep
Yellow Warbler	11 Sep	3 Sep	3 Oct	3 Oct	15 Sep				6 Sep	19 Sep	17 Sep
Chestnut-sided Warbler		19 Sep	10 Sep	4 Oct	25 Sep		14 Sep	15 Oct	16 Oct	15 Sep	26 Sep
Magnolia Warbler	23 Sep	17 Oct	12 Oct	17 Oct	25 Sep		18 Sep	2 Oct	25 Sep	6 Oct	2 Oct
Cape May Warbler	8 Oct	23 Sep	28 Sep	29 Oct	5 Oct				28 Oct	15 Oct	10 Oct
Black-thr Blue Warbler	8 Oct	1 Oct	4 Oct	18 Sep	1 Oct		29 Sep	15 Sep	6 Oct	20 Oct	1 Oct
Black-thr Green Warbler	9 Oct	24 Sep	4 Oct	4 Oct	28 Sep		26 Sep		23 Oct	16 Oct	5 Oct
Blackburnian Warbler	16 Sep	14 Sep	24 Sep	25 Sep	25 Sep	18 Nov		17 Sep	7 Sep	27 Sep	26 Sep
Bay-breasted Warbler	8 Sep	8 Oct	24 Sep	26 Sep	24 Sep			21 Sep	5 Oct	30 Oct	29 Sep
Blackpoll Warbler	5 Oct	24 Sep	4 Oct	21 Sep	25 Sep		18 Sep	28 Sep	30 Oct	15 Oct	2 Oct
Black-and-white Warbler	21 Sep	2 Oct	3 Oct	10 Sep	25 Sep		9 Sep		17 Sep	20 Oct	24 Sep
American Redstart	23 Sep	8 Oct	28 Sep	20 Sep	25 Sep		8 Sep	14 Sep	17 Sep	22 Oct	25 Sep
Ovenbird	25 Sep	24 Sep	11 Sep	2 Oct	24 Sep	2 Sep	3 Oct	3 Oct	22 Sep	18 Oct	25 Sep
N. Waterthrush	21 Sep	29 Sep	7 Aug	15 Sep	12 Sep					9 Oct	15 Sep
Common Yellowthroat	21 Sep	9 Oct	8 Oct	15 Oct	4 Oct		23 Sep		14 Oct	3 Dec	12 Oct
Wilson's Warbler	22 Sep	19 Sep	10 Sep	17 Sep	24 Sep		10 Sep		10 Sep	20 Oct	20 Sep
Canada Warbler	13 Sep	16 Sep		3 Sep	15 Sep				17 Sep	6 Oct	16 Sep
Scarlet Tanager		16 Sep	1 Oct	4 Oct	29 Sep		5 Sep	28 Sep	27 Sep	6 Oct	25 Sep
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	10 Oct	24 Sep	28 Sep	8 Oct	29 Sep	13 Sep	20 Sep	21 Sep	29 Sep	6 Oct	27 Sep
Rufous-sided Towhee	22 Nov	15 Oct	19 Oct	19 Nov	29 Oct			15 Oct	6 Nov	10 Nov	1 Nov
Lincoln's Sparrow	9 Oct	15 Oct	9 Oct	17 Oct	26 Sep		30 Sep	25 Sep	7 Oct	22 Oct	7 Oct
White-crowned Sparrow	14 Nov	29 Oct	12 Nov	31 Oct	25 Oct	29 Sep	23 Oct		19 Nov	6 Nov	31 Oct
Bobolink		6 Aug	7 Sep	11 Sep	5 Sep		28 Oct			15 Oct	16 Sep
Northern Oriole	13 Sep	18 Sep	28 Sep	8 Sep	3 Sep	2 Sep	14 Aug		11 Sep	26 Nov	17 Sep

Bold Regional Record Late

Italics also isolated later report(s).

Region	Species Reported	Seasonality (days)	Advance (days)
Region 1	55	-5.5	4.0
Region 2	61	-9.8	1.4
Region 3	57	-6.0	-0.2
Region 4	54	-1.5	-0.4
Region 5	62	-9.5	-0.9
Region 6	23	-9.9	-14.8
Region 7	43	-4.8	-13.1
Region 8	26	-7.7	-5.0
Region 9	55	-9.4	2.0
Region 10	54	-8.9	13.2

similar to an Advance column prepared from 25-year average departure dates. The way in which I have generated the estimates of variance used in this summary has been detailed in the previous two Winter issues of *The Kingbird* and need not be repeated here. These earlier analyses also have dealt with the difficulties of obtaining good departure date data. This certainly remains a problem with this season's report but it clearly is not an explanation for the very early disappearance of most migrants this Fall.

This was not a good season for rarities. Most have been noted in the commentary above. The best of the rest were: Region 1 - Sandhill Crane and Red Phalarope; Region 2 - Marbled Godwit, Western Kingbird, and Sharp-tailed Sparrow; Region 3 - Clay-colored and Sharp-tailed Sparrows; Region 4 - Western Sandpiper and Brewer's Blackbird; and Region 6 - Pomarine Jaeger, Com. Black-headed Gull, and Carolina Wren. It is worth noting that Region 10, as usual, recorded many vagrants that would rate as extreme rarities elsewhere in the state, but are regular fall visitors on the coast. There were no rarities rating a B.O.T.S. award this season. Let us hope this improves as we all beat the bushes on our Christmas Counts and that the Spring will bring an improved passage of migrant birds.

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; 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; subad — subadult; T — Town of; Twn — township; WMA — Wildlife Management Area; y — young.