

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

ROBERT SPAHN

This summer apparently was relatively normal, with typical variations from Region to Region. Most comments were in reference to last summer. It was not another hot, dry summer like 1988. This summer saw few days above 90° in most Regions. The heavy rains of May and June eliminated any fear of drought in most areas. July and August were average to a bit on the cool and dry side over most of the state. There was less rainfall in Regions 6 & 7 during June and more rainfall in eastern and particularly southeastern parts of the state late in the season. In Region 10 rainfall was heavy through the whole season, with totals more than double normal and some locales receiving much more than that. These periods of heavy rains adversely impacted some insectivorous birds which were trying to nest in early June and marsh birds nesting along the south shore of Lake Ontario, where water levels rose significantly through most of June. The same rains produced the best conditions for shorebirding which long-time birders can recall in some parts of Long Island, where the heavy rains produced dependable pools and mudflats in places which normally have these conditions only intermittently. Generally it seems to have been a good breeding season with two relatively poor periods of migration at the start and end, typical of the past several years.

Once again late spring migrants seemed scarce. We really are talking only about some shorebirds and gulls, several warbler species, and a couple of flycatchers and thrushes, but in the past, early June field trips dependably could find some of each of these groups. Again this year such finds were few. Some of the more interesting observations were two late **Sandhill Crane** in Region 1, more spring Sanderling than normal in Regions 2 & 5; a late Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Region 2; and unusual numbers of Bonaparte's Gull in the late spring and summer along with several species often found with them, including late Franklin's and Laughing Gull and a very late or summering adult Little Gull in Region 2.

Summer is primarily the nesting season. The Regional reports contain several fairly regular features: from Region 1 a summary of the Regional breeding bird surveys and nest search efforts, from Region 3 the waterfowl production summary from Montezuma NWR, from Region 7 the report of the Four Brothers Islands visits and summaries of banding on the islands and elsewhere, and from Region 10 the Jamaica Bay WR

shorebird survey and a summary of pelagic trip results. Such regular data provide a few relatively easy comparisons among years in search of trends. Other notes which will be interesting to follow are detailed surveys in maturing pine plantations, with concomitant increase in breeding of species we normally associate with more northerly latitudes or higher elevations in New York, in Regions 1 & 3, and specific notes about the status of species of special concern at all levels from 'Endangered' to simply 'noted as of possible concern in these pages,' from Region 6. Such summaries hopefully will provoke readers to think about and investigate the questions they raise!

From these general summaries, we can move through the checklist looking for trends and notes of interest. The Region 10 report specifically asks a question which I think many have asked silently over the past several years: Is the increase in summering Common Loons outside the Adirondacks related to acid rain making many non-breeders or terminating many breeding attempts very early, or does it reflect an increase in loon numbers? We find some hope of improved Pied-billed Grebe nesting in Regions 3 and 7. All Regions mentioned Double-crested Cormorant, with very high counts in many reports. Among the herons, bitterns continue scarce, Great Egret was more widespread than typical of recent years, Cattle Egret was noted only in Regions 1 and 10, Green-backed Heron remains a question - mentioned in only four Regions, and Great Blue Heron continues to prosper. Waterfowl trends include apparent decrease in nesting Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, and Am. Black Duck; a good season for Wood Duck; continued breeding of Am. Wigeon in Regions 1 and 2 but decreases were noted in Region 6; and widespread note of summering or nesting Common and Red-breasted Merganser. Raptor notes include: increased Osprey records, including nesting in Regions 1 & 3; successful Bald Eagle nesting in Region 7, a first in decades; decreased reports of breeding accipiters, particularly N. Goshawk; continued low numbers of breeding Red-shouldered Hawk; and some notes of concern over numbers of breeding Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel. Marsh birds probably affected by the high water levels mentioned above include rails, Common Moorhen, and Black Tern. These negatives were not countered by positive reports for these species in other areas. Nesting shorebirds are few and comments fewer yet, but add Spotted Sandpiper to those which deserve monitoring. From Region 10 we have a positive note in increases for Piping Plover and Least Tern due nest site protection efforts. Gulls finally bred in Region 2, with at least 100 nests of Ring-billed Gull on a rooftop at Eastman Kodak Co. Look for more details in a future note. It is highly

unlikely that such nesting will be allowed to recur at this site because of olfactory aesthetics and potential health concerns. Tern observations of interest include Common Tern nesting on navigation aids off Region 6, excellent counts at Common Tern colonies in Region 10, and finally no nesting Black Tern at Montezuma NWR where hundreds of pairs nested not long ago. Black Skimmer was logged at a maximum of 337 pairs in Region 10.

We continue with a litany of status reports: the only good cuckoo reports came from Regions 8 & 9; there were few owl reports, only negatives for the caprimulgids, no real pluses for hummingbirds, few Red-headed Woodpecker reports, but finally a positive in notes about Red-bellied Woodpecker at the edges of its expanding range. Flycatcher notes include low counts for Olive-sided both in migration and on the breeding grounds and negatives for Eastern Wood-Pewee in Regions 6 & 7. Among the swallows, Purple Martin numbers continue to be a concern, Tree Swallow was impacted by the June rains, and a Bank Swallow colony spared from the bulldozer in Region 8 at least to this season's end. Common Raven noted in six of the nine Regions reporting is a continuing positive trend. For most other breeding passerines there is too little data to draw many conclusions, but some of the notes include: the continued success of bluebird nest box trails, e.g. over 700 fledged from one trail in Region 9; low numbers of Brown Thrasher; no breeding reports for Loggerhead Shrike; a first Franklin County nest record for Blue-winged Warbler in Region 7; continuing decreases for Golden-winged Warbler, generally; a first regional nesting of Cape May Warbler in Region 8; declines in numbers suggested for Black-throated Blue and Cerulean Warblers; pluses for Chipping Sparrow but general declines for all the grassland sparrows in spite of the note from Region 8 that their scarcity may be causing more effort from observers and somewhat more reports than their numbers actually warrant, especially for Grasshopper and Henslow's Sparrow. Several regions express some concern for blackbirds as diverse as E. Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird, and N. Oriole. To close on a few more positive notes: Orchard Oriole records increased, House Finches multiply, and White-winged Crossbill may have nested in Region 1 or nearby.

The fall migration starts with shorebirds returning in late June and a trickle of warblers and other passerines beginning in late July. Upstate the picture was muddled by high water, though drawdowns at Montezuma NWR in Region 3 and in Region 8 provided local hotspots. In Region 10 the dune ponds noted earlier provided great shorebirding on Long Island, and the Jamaica Bay WR counts rolled up excellent

totals of early shorebird migrants. Counts of special note included: 500+ Red Knot and a record high 11 Wilson's Phalarope in Region 10; Baird's Sandpiper counts were good, Stilt Sandpiper was late, and dowitchers were very scarce except in Region 10. The passerine movement was miniscule and only Blackpoll Warbler in Regions 5 and 8 represented notably early dates. Once again, the start of the fall migration was **slow**. The typical fall flocking of swallows provided a taste of times past, with the best noted a gathering of 100,000+ in Region 10. Hard to place in this slow, late period was a Red-necked Grebe in Region 6, filling in the calendar as the state's first August record.

Rarities, typical of summer, were generally birds out of place in time or location within the state rather than species unexpected at all here. The best of the lot were: Region 1 - **Sandhill Crane**; Region 2 - **Mississippi Kite** and Laughing Gull; Region 3 - White-eyed Vireo and Barn Owl; Region 5 - Willet and Fish Crow; Region 6 - Sedge Wren; Region 7 - Carolina Wren and Blue-winged Warbler; Region 8 - Sedge Wren, nesting Cape May Warbler, and Prothonotary Warbler; Region 9 - Yellow-headed Blackbird; and Region 10 - **American White Pelican**, numerous **Brown Pelican**, American Avocet, Ruff, and Franklin's Gull. Given this list, the BOTS award also partly reflects timing and goes to the August **Mississippi Kite** from Region 10, a first for the state at this time of the year.

716 High Tower Way, Webster, New York 14580

Standard abbreviations: county names are shortened to their first four letters and appear in UPPER CASE letters; months are shortened to their first three letters; ! — details seen by Regional editor; ad — adult; Alt — Alternate plumage; arr — arrival or first of season; BBS — Breeding Bird Survey; CO — confirmed; 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.