

REGION 8 - HUDSON-MOHAWK

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Most reporters concurred that Spring, 1990, was another in a growing series of lackluster migrations. We are being bombarded with messages about the decline of neotropical migrants. Is the decline real, and are our casual field observations reflecting it? I would answer, "I don't know" and "Probably not." Last winter I attended a symposium, sponsored by Manomet Bird Observatory, devoted entirely to the question of what is happening to populations of passerines that migrate into the tropics. I left with the conclusion that no very clear answer emerged. Data were presented that showed some species declining in some regions, but increasing or stable in others. Other neotropical migrant species seem to be increasing everywhere, some declining everywhere. Not all declining species go into the tropics. The issue is very complicated and I think it is not clear what the patterns are; in many of the cases where population declines seem clear, it is not known whether the problem lies on the wintering ground, the breeding ground, or both. It is hard to imagine that the massive deforestation that has occurred in Middle America (where most of our tropical migrants overwinter) has not had an adverse impact on migrant populations. But not all species require or even prefer mature forest habitat. Differences in species' ecology are one of the

complicating factors. The other, more relevant to our consideration here, is that the population changes are likely to be small. We are not going to go from an apparently normal situation to the silent spring in one step. This makes it very difficult to monitor with much confidence what is going on. At any one time, some bird populations are always declining, others increasing. What point do we pick as the standard against which to compare present levels? It is critically important that we continue to try to discern the trends so that we can know what is going on before populations reach crisis levels. One of the organizers of the conference used an apt metaphor: he noted that a man may be losing his hair at only two percent per year, but inevitably he will be bald.

Can local observations during migration tell us much about what is going on? Unless they are very systematically made and long term, I doubt it. This spring, for example, an observer in this Region would have to conclude that Blackpoll and Tennessee Warblers, and the transient *Catharus* thrushes are on the verge of extinction. This is surely not the case. The problem is that there are many other variables besides actual population size. Notable among these is the fact that migration as viewed on the ground is strongly influenced by weather, both local and regional.

This spring's weather in Region 8 was odd in several ways that profoundly affected migration. March and April were the third and fourth straight months with temperatures averaging above normal. These two months, as well as May, were also above normal in precipitation, so that by the end of the period Albany was 7.5 inches above normal for the year. The first big weather event that influenced migration was that April was actually cool until near the end of the month. Beginning 26 Apr, abnormally warm air streamed northward, bringing record temperatures (90° on 26 Apr, 92° on 28 Apr). With this air mass came a huge push of migrants; many early and some record early arrival dates were established. During that three day period, 14 species of warbler arrived, along with Least and Great Crested Flycatchers, Eastern Kingbird, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Yellow-throated and Warbling Vireos, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Northern Oriole. Strangely, no overshoot southern species were found. With the beginning of May, winter returned; cool and wet weather dominated the first twenty days of the month. Migration came to a virtual standstill. Those species that didn't arrive at the end of April tended to be late. The situation didn't improve until the last ten days of the month when a period of fine weather with southerly winds occurred. Almost no

migrants were seen. Many active field observers saw one, two, or even no Blackpoll Warblers during the entire season! Tennessee Warblers, whose songs usually ring forth from every maple, were reported in ones and twos. Presumably they all just flooded through as rapidly as possible once the weather dam was broken.

The other extraordinary event of the spring was really an extension of winter events. Crossbills and Pine Siskin remained in large numbers and the latter bred in many places. Siskin numbers began building in late February and this continued through March and the first half of April. In 20 years of intensive banding of winter finches, Yunick had never seen anything like it. From January through May he banded 4044 siskins. He noted the first bird in breeding condition (female with brood patch) on 29 Mar in Schenectady. Males in breeding condition were noted at about the same time. Females with eggs in the oviduct were captured beginning on 7 Apr at Jenny L, and others sporadically until mid May. By that time, some females had brood patches that were beginning to refeather, indicating that breeding was completed. Young of the year first appeared in Schenectady on 9 May. Breeding activity was also noted in Berne (KPA) and S. Westerlo (BC). By the last half of May, numbers had declined markedly. Did they move north and breed again? Both crossbill species were present until the end of the period and may have bred, but nesting was not reported.

Rarities during the period included **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**, **Little Gull**, Orange-crowned Warbler, **Dickcissel**, and an extraordinary adult **Franklin's Gull** in breeding plumage.

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Abbreviations: Alcove - Alcove Res, ALBA; Basic - Basic Creek Res, ALBA; BlCrM - Black Creek Marsh, ALBA; FiveR - Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Delmar; SaraBNHP - Saratoga Battlefield National Historical Park; SaraL - Saratoga L.

LOONS-DUCKS: Red-throated Loon: one Round L 5 May (SBT), only report. Com. Loon: 25 SaraL 15 Apr (SBT), large number. Pied-billed Grebe: seven reports including return to Stony Cr Res breeding locale. Horned Grebe: 15 SaraL 15 Apr (SBT), large number; one 26 May Basic (BC), late. Red-necked Grebe: max 20 SaraL 13 Apr. Double-crested Cormorant: max 24 Hudson R COLU 26 Apr (PFC). Least Bittern: one BlCrM 22 May (BB,KB). Great Egret: one Vischer Ferry 19 May (CF). **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**: one ad Slingerlands ALBA 17

May (WBS). Mute Swan: stable on Hudson R south of Albany; near Ft Edward WASH 28 May (JS). Snow Goose: large movements 14-18 Mar; one each SaraL and Sutherland Pd COLU 19 May (WG, et al.; RC, et al.), late. Brant: flocks of 200-400 ALBA 15-20 May. Canvasback: 2000 Hudson R COLU 10,11 Mar (WC). Lesser Scaup: two Basic 27 May (BC), late. Oldsquaw: max 60 ALBA, SARA 21 Apr (SBT). Black Scoter: one Hudson R COLU 12 May (KD,EG,MU), rare in spring. Surf Scoter: six L George 30 Apr, 14 May (LM), rare in spring. Hooded Merganser: two nest boxes active Ghent and Churchtown COLU 7 May (fide WC). Com. Merganser: max 200+ Round L 25 Mar (SBT).

HAWK-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: arr Gallupville 11 Mar (BB,KB). Bald Eagle: 18 reports including two hacked Alcove 1985 and 1988. N. Goshawk: increase, 14 reports including nesting Greenfield SARA (CF). Merlin: four reports. Peregrine Falcon: one each E Schodack 16 Mar, Catskill 31 Mar (PFC; fide WC). Ring-necked Pheasant: now regular only in COLU; one Hague WARR 15 Mar (MB), one Greenfield 19 May (CF). Black-bellied Plover: one Basic 25 Apr (KPA), record early; Basic 29 Apr, 26 May (BC), rare in spring. Semipalmated Plover: max 20 Basic 26 May (BC). Greater Yellowlegs: one Basic 27 May (BC), late. Upland Sandpiper: one COLU 12 May (NK,DS), one Minaville 26 May (BB,KB). Dunlin: Basic 6-27 May, max 11 16 May. Short-billed Dowitcher: 10 Basic 16 May (KPA), rare in spring. **Little Gull**: one ad Alcove 15 Apr (KPA), second Regional record. **Franklin's Gull**: one ad SaraL 19 May (WG,PFC,MG,MK), second Regional record, first in spring. Com. Tern: 15+ SaraL 19 May (PFC, et al.), large number.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Black-billed Cuckoo: one Ancram 10 May (fide PI), early. Yellow-billed Cuckoo: one Jefferson 25 May (AM), only report. Short-eared Owl: one each Claverack 12 Apr, Ancram 12 May (WC). N. Saw-whet Owl: two reports of migrants. Whip-poor-will: arr WARR 30 Apr (BP). Red-headed Woodpecker: COLU 12 May (JJC), only report. Red-bellied Woodpecker: three reports, all COLU.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: E. Wood-Pewee: one Greenport COLU 9 May (WC), early. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: one Vischer Ferry 19 May (RPY), only report. Great Crested Flycatcher: one Delmar 29 Apr (SM), early. E. Kingbird: arr 28 Apr, early. Purple Martin: 20+ Hague after mid Apr (LM), possible new breeding locality. Tree Swallow: six Schuylerville 13 Mar (BP), early. Barn Swallow: arr FiveR 10 Apr (AM), early. Fish Crow: nesting again Schenectady (RPY). Com. Raven: reported from Thacher SP, Petersburg, Hague. Black-capped Chickadee: at Jenny L small numbers in winter built in Mar and Apr, with 114 captures in Apr; many spring birds were lingerers from winter; 20 males in breeding condition in May were far more than the usual 4-6 breeding pairs (RPY). Tufted Titmouse: breeding again 1250 ft elevation at Jenny L (RPY). Red-breasted Nuthatch: stayed and bred in several atypical places; late winter and early spring numbers well above average at Jenny L (RPY). Carolina Wren: four reports including Chrysler Pd COLU (WC), FiveR (AM). Golden-crowned Kinglet: large movement 13 Apr. Ruby-crowned Kinglet: arr 10 Apr FiveR (AM). Gray-cheeked Thrush: one Thacher SP 26 May (LA), only report. Wood Thrush:

one Schodack Center 27 Apr (PFC), early. Cedar Waxwing: numerous. N. Shrike: singles Gansevoort 8 Mar (BP), Jefferson 6 Apr (AM).

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: Yellow-throated Vireo: one L Taghkanic 28 Apr (WC), early. Red-eyed Vireo: one Olana COLU 9 May (WC), early. Tennessee Warbler: two Albany 9 May (KPA,RLH), early. Orange-crowned Warbler: two Delmar 16 May (SM), rare in spring. N. Parula: one BICrM 28 Apr (SBT), early. Chestnut-sided Warbler: arr Berne 29 Apr (KPA), early. Cape May Warbler: one m Luther Woods SARA 28 Apr (SBT), very early. Bay-breasted Warbler: one m SaraL 5 May (SBT), early. Hooded Warbler: unconfirmed report of male stunned by window Colonie 24 May (fide BB). Wilson's Warbler: one FiveR 9 May (AM), record early.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: Rose-breasted Grosbeak: arr Berne 29 Apr (KPA), early. Indigo Bunting: arr Gallupville 10 May (BB,KB), early. Dickcissel: male Ghent last seen 1 Apr (OW). Am. Tree Sparrow: last Gansevoort 8 May (BP). Grasshopper Sparrow: SaraBNHP 12 May (BB,KB). Henslow's Sparrow: SaraBNHP 6 May (BB,KB). Lincoln's Sparrow: scarcer than usual (RPY). Dark-eyed Junco: departed Schenectady 27-28 Apr, earlier than usual (RPY). Bobolink: arr Knox 30 Apr (KPA). Rusty Blackbird: two pair Ballston L to end of period (SBT). Brown-headed Cowbird: continues scarce Jenny L; more numerous 10-15 years ago (RPY). Orchard Oriole: two reports COLU. Pine Grosbeak: three reports, last Hague 24 Mar (LM,ER). House Finch: not as numerous Schenectady as 10-15 years ago (RPY). Red Crossbill: lingered late; 20 Cole Hill SF 16, 19 May (KPA,RLH), 25 FiveR 16 May (AM). White-winged Crossbill: present to end of period; 200 Partridge Run GMA 11 Mar (BC); 7,4 Cole Hill SF 16, 19 May (KPA,RLH). Com. Redpoll: three reports of singles. Pine Siskin: *intro*. Evening Grosbeak: last Jenny L 19 May (RPY).

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