

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

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When writing a seasonal "Highlights" report, one goes through the weather data presented by each editor to seek some pattern that is consistent throughout the state. This is particularly difficult in New York State because of its size and topographical variation. However, this season a common denominator is present, **rain!** Only Region 2 speaks of normal precipitation, while Regions 9 and 10 relate record breaking wet Augusts, and the other Regions report yearly rainfall totals above normal at the end of the period. Once a discernible weather pattern is found, one then searches for a possible impact of that pattern on New York's birds. This again is difficult because of the individual biases displayed by the Regional editors when describing the avian life in their bailiwicks. Another problem is trying to decide if the weather was more important in influencing bird populations or the time birders spent afield. It is also quite apparent that since the end of the breeding bird atlas field work, there are far fewer observers in the field during the summer, especially in the less populous Regions. Perhaps we need a continuation of Atlas "blockbusting" to get a truer picture of the breeding season.

Having said all of the above, let us see if we can make some sense out of the material on hand. The only species whose breeding success this summer seemed to be weather related are Tree Swallow and Eastern Bluebird. Regions 2, 4 and 5 report lowered swallow populations in periods with cold June temperatures. However, there seems to be no consistency in the reports of Eastern Bluebird, with Region 1 reporting high fledgling losses because of a cold June, but an overall hatching success greater than the previous year's; Region 2 speaks of a plus; Region 4 tells us of "most nestings since the Nest Box Trail established in 1981"; Region 5 advises that cold June weather caused a net loss of bluebirds successfully fledged, while Region 9 says, "continued widespread success." One thing, however, that does remain abundantly clear is the importance of the Nest Box program in the continuing good health and recovery of bluebirds, and the part played and still being played by certain Federation members in this program.

The other rain related factor has nothing to do with breeding birds, but everything to do with shorebirding in Region 10. There the abundant rain continued to produce the spectacular shorebirding conditions as it

did last year. Also, see Steve Eaton's note in Region 1 about the tornado that touched down in Allegany State Park!

We can glean information less closely tied to the season's weather from those reports as well. The only Regions in which Common Loon breeds in New York State are 5, 6, 7 and 8. What limited information we have seems to indicate no change in its current status. The Double-crested Cormorant marches on!! Region 2 tells us of an increase in summering birds which is may be a harbinger of future breeding there. Region 5 shows steadily increasing numbers of breeding birds in Oneida Lake. Region 5 mentions high brood success while Region 7 shows a 50% increase in active nests. Region 10 merely mentions increased numbers in beach areas but the fact remains that the species has further entrenched itself with continued increases even within the physical limits of New York City itself. The information on herons and bitterns doesn't offer much except to point out the continued scarcity of both bittern species due to reduced habitat. And just what is a Cattle Egret doing in Region 8 in mid June, which is much too early for the typical heron post-breeding dispersal. Region 2 greets its first breeding record of Mute Swan with some circumspection, as well it might. No mention of Canada Goose is made in Regions 8, 9 and 10. This omission has nothing to do with lack of breeding success, I assure you. It is simply that the species has reached the status of such ordinary species as House Sparrow and European Starling, birds to be tolerated, and perhaps if they are ignored, they might go away, and the less said the better. Regions 2 and 4 report on the continued decline of American Black Duck and Blue-winged Teal. Mary Dobinsky, the new Region 4 advises that Wood Duck has supplanted the Mallard as the commonest breeding duck in the Region! Again we have to look to a nest box program as one of the reasons for the phenomenal increase of Wood Duck numbers in the last two decades.

While not yet recorded as breeding in New York State, I am inserting the Black Vulture here to alert observers of that possibility in the near future, as occurrences increase. Region 8 had its first such record on 30 June. Osprey continues to show marvelous strides and is now nesting in areas which historically lacked them, such as western Nassau County and New York City proper. The Bald Eagle is doing well and the Peregrine Falcon is holding its own, with the success of both species attributable in large part to the hacking program administered jointly by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and the New York Department of Environmental Conservation.

While no mention is made of the Piping Plover in Region 10, it is only fair to report that this intriguing little shorebird seems to be maintaining itself well in the Region with the help of a number of dedicated nest area watchers working in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy. Make sure you read Mike Peterson's discussion of mortality in the Ring-billed Gull colonies on Four Brothers Islands. This will correct some earlier erroneous reports which appeared in various newspapers. Caspian Tern news is good. These striking larids were first found breeding on Little Galloo Island in Region 6 in 1986. The colony now numbers some 640 adults, a figure which is double what it was in 1989. As to Roseate Tern, while the Cedar Beach colony in Region 10 lost some birds, the Great Gull Island colony, also in Region 10, continues to be very healthy under the ministrations of a Federation member club, The Linnaean Society of New York, supervised by Helen Hays. However, the news on Black Tern is at best depressing.

Both Regions 6 and 7 attest to the increase of the Wild Turkey population. Several Regions point out that the Mourning Dove is flourishing. This bird isn't bright enough to build a nest that is tight enough to keep its eggs from falling through to the ground, yet that seems to make no difference to its success as a species.

The Common Raven continues its increase in the state, with new territories being established in Regions 1, 6, 8 and 9. A singing Cape May Warbler in Region 8 on 16 June was apparently in the same spot that held a breeding pair of these birds last year. During the entire Atlas period there was no "Confirmed" breeding record in the entire state, and those listed as "Probable" were in Regions 6 and 7. White-winged Crossbill was present during the period in Regions 1, 4 and 8. Breeding was suspected but not confirmed. However, Pine Siskin did nest in Region 1, this being the third confirmed nesting record for that Region.

Since the next bird represents the very first New York State breeding record, I have moved it out of checklist order to highlight it. Long sought as a breeding bird because of the numerous spring and early summer occurrences, a pair of **Summer Tanager** was found nesting on the grounds of the Brookhaven National Laboratory in Suffolk County in Region 10.

Besides the breeding birds, each Region had some interesting birds which deserve special mention. There was a **Curlew Sandpiper** in Region 1, an **American White Pelican** in Region 2 as well as a Loggerhead Shrike which deserves mention anywhere in the state. A first for Region 4 was a Clay-colored Sparrow on 7 June. You wonder

what it was doing there on that date and perhaps look forward to a closer scrutiny of the area next year. Acadian Flycatcher is highlighted in Region 5, while a Carolina Wren in Region 6 for a first St. Lawrence County record, way out its normal breeding range in the state. I hope it was alone, for a breeding pair would never survive the winter in that frigid part of the state. An out of place Red-bellied Woodpecker was present in Region 7, while Region 8 produced the already mentioned **Black Vulture**, Cattle Egret and also a number of **Sandhill Crane**. A Caspian Tern ventured up the Hudson River for the second time in three decades in Region 9, and another Loggerhead Shrike there is worthy of mention. Region 10 had its usual share of "good" birds including **Brown Pelican**, Black Rail, **Black-necked Stilt**, American Avocet, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff and **Sandwich Tern**. However, as this is the nesting season, the BOTS (Bird of the Season) award must go to Region 10's nesting **Summer Tanager**, as that record represents a first breeding record in the state.

This Highlights report was compiled without a Region 3 report, which had not arrived in time.

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Standard abbreviations: county names are shortened to their first four letters and are in UPPER case; 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 — nesting 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.