

REGION 3 — FINGER LAKES

C.K. MELIN AND C.R. SMITH

March and April in the Finger Lakes were colder and wetter than normal, with precipitation about 20 percent above average. Although the first week of March was warm and spring-like, and flocks of geese and swans moved into the Region, a series of cold fronts from 11–16 Mar and 26–30 Mar brought snow and most of the precipitation for the month. An interlude between these fronts, from 15–23 Mar, was a period of many observations of Turkey Vulture in the Region, as well as the third spring **Black Vulture** record in as many years. The persistent cold and snowy conditions caused many Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur to linger in the Region until late March. American Pipit, by comparison, were scarce and difficult to find this season. Several reports of Fox Sparrow (1–8 individuals) from area feeders followed the 11 Mar snow storm, birds persisting until 30 Apr; D. Clements noted, “Every observant feeder watcher in the county saw Fox Sparrows this year, and again no one can ever remember a Fox Sparrow influx like this before.”

At the beginning of April, a stalled low pressure front pushed the temperatures 10 to 15°F below normal, with snow, fog, and freezing temperatures until 5 Apr, when skies cleared and temperatures were more seasonable with highs near 40°F. By 7 Apr, daytime highs in Ithaca and Elmira were 66°F. A low front crossing the Great Lakes brought heavy rains and northwest winds gusting up to 30 mph on 11–12 Apr, following by a large high pressure system through 15 Apr. A migration “pulse” occurred between 12–15 Apr, when numbers of Rough-legged Hawk, Osprey, Common Snipe, and hundreds of Snow Geese were observed throughout

the Finger Lakes. Despite lots of sunshine, temperatures remained below normal and nighttime lows were well below freezing. On 14 Apr, a minimum temperature record, which had stood since 1885, was broken when Ithaca cooled to 20°F. Rains, fog, and below-normal temperatures were pervasive from 16–19 Apr, followed by warmer and sunnier conditions from 19–21 Apr with temperatures near 70°F. Waterfowl migration accelerated during this warmer period, but a series of low fronts, cooler temperatures, and rainy weather patterns followed through 26 Apr. During this brief reversal in warming trends, migrating waterfowl stalled northward migration and rested in the Seneca Lake/Cayuga Lake/Montezuma areas. Highlights from 23–24 Apr were a **Glossy Ibis** and numbers of Common and **Red-throated Loon**, Horned and **Red-necked Grebe**, and White-winged Scoter.

May temperature and precipitation were at normal levels. May started with warm temperatures as high as 80°F, followed by a powerful cold front on 2 May which brought severe thunderstorms and hail to the Finger Lakes. Cool temperatures followed this front, and stayed below normal through 5 May. By 8 May, skies were sunny and temperatures up to 70°F, conditions which persisted with warming temperatures until a cold front on 13 May brought heavy thunderstorms and more hail. Warming conditions continued interspersed with rainstorms through 23 May. During this warming trend, numbers of shorebirds were observed at May's Point Pool at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge including a **Ruff**. A strong cold front on 24 May dropped temperatures into the 20's and 30's and set new low temperatures about 15°F below normal until the end of May. The cold periods in May resulted in nestling mortality for Tree Swallow and Eastern Bluebird, unable to find sufficient insect food for their young.

As expected, the Region's lakes and waterways provided an abundance of waterfowl during the migration periods of March and April. The Cayuga Marsh area at the north end of Cayuga Lake was especially abundant and varied in waterfowl this season while nearby Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge remained frozen over. In mid May, numbers of shorebirds were present the Chemung River near the NYSEG dam in Elmira, and a few at the Big Flats Marsh and Corning Pond as well as at May's Point Pool. On 18 May Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Ruddy Turnstone, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitcher, Common Snipe,

and American Woodcock were seen at Montezuma NWR. In these areas, both waterfowl and shorebirds attracted Peregrine Falcon. Also present all season were numbers of Northern Harrier and Rough-legged Hawk. Owls were widespread throughout the Region although not common as expected; six species were reported.

N. Brinkley, A. Byrne, and B. Guirey made a special effort to document hawk migration over Mt. Pleasant (1750 ft elevation), east of Ithaca, for 19 days from 5 Mar through 9 May, amassing 76 hours of observation time. Species and totals for the period included 165 Turkey Vulture, 12 Osprey, 2 Bald Eagle, 39 Northern Harrier, 103 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 40 Cooper's Hawk, 24 Northern Goshawk, 53 Red-shouldered Hawk, 35 Broad-winged Hawk, 358 Red-tailed Hawk, 31 Rough-legged Hawk, 6 Golden Eagle, 47 American Kestrel, 1 Merlin, 3 Peregrine Falcon, and 95 unidentified raptors. The potential for spring hawk migration over Mt. Pleasant was first noted on 29 April 1989 by C. R. Smith, when 23 raptors, representing eight species were seen in less than 20 minutes with favorable southerly winds. During 1988, Steve Sibley kept track of spring hawk migration over Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary, northwest of Mt. Pleasant, counting 103 raptors, representing eight species (*Kingbird* 38:199). While these counts are quite modest compared to Braddock Bay or Derby Hill, they do carefully document observable spring movements of raptors through our Region for the first time. Perhaps efforts by other observers from additional high hills in the Region would produce similar results in 1993. The Mt. Pleasant location is surrounded by pastures and cultivated fields and provides an unobstructed 360-degree view to the horizon.

Perhaps because of the varied weather patterns for the period, it also was a season for rarities. Highlights for the spring season included **Gyr Falcon, Black Vulture, Brewer's Blackbird, Western Kingbird, American White Pelican, Eared Grebe, Glossy Ibis, Ruff, Little Gull, Common Black-headed Gull, Black Tern, Sedge Wren, Yellow-throated Warbler, and Kentucky Warbler.** In spite of the unseasonably cool spring, several migrants set new early arrival records, with 46 of 93 regularly occurring migrants appearing earlier than the average dates reported historically (*Kingbird* 37: 9-24).

Three area bird clubs and one independent team reported results of Big Day Counts: Cayuga Bird Club, 16 May, 172 species; Chemung Valley Audubon, 9 May, 117 species; Eaton Birding Society, 17 May, 97 species; and a team which included N. Brinkley, A. Byrne, A. Farnsworth, and C. Smith

on 18 May, 168 species (a new team record for the Cayuga Lake Basin).

Contributors: F. Bertram, N. Brinkley, A. Byrne, J. Brubaker, D. Clements, Cayuga Bird Club, Chemung Valley Audubon Society, K. David, Eaton Birding Society, A. Farnsworth, B. Guirey, B. Hilfiker, A. Robinson, D. Russell, Schuyler County Bird Club.

Abbreviations: CH - Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area; CL - Cayuga Lake, CLSP - Cayuga Lake State Park; CM - Cayuga Marsh at north end of Cayuga Lake; MNWR - Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; MtP - Mt. Pleasant, near Ithaca, QCM - Queen Catherine Marsh, south end of Seneca Lake; SWS - Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary.

Spring reports: **RED-THROATED LOON:** max three CL 24-25 Apr. **Com. Loon:** present throughout; max 410 CL 30 Apr. **Horned Grebe:** present throughout; max 65 MNWR 24 Apr. **EARED GREBE:** one MNWR 5-8 May (B. Beal). **Red-necked Grebe:** max 46 CL 24 Apr. **Double-crested Cormorant:** present after mid-Apr. **AM. WHITE PELICAN:** ad MNWR 23-26 Apr. **Am. Bittern:** singles present throughout Region. **Least Bittern:** one Seneca Falls late Apr (BH). **GLOSSY IBIS:** one MNWR 23-29 Apr. **Tundra Swan:** max 156 CM 21 Mar. **Snow Goose:** 4100± MNWR 19-28 Apr. **Brant:** 283 flying over MNWR 18 May, three MNWR 23 May. **EURASIAN WIGEON:** up to three males CL 20 Mar through 5 Apr. **Black Scoter:** one male MNWR 24 Apr. **White-winged Scoter:** 51 CL 23-24 Apr (NB). **Surf Scoter:** two CLSP 24 Apr.

BLACK VULTURE: one over Cayuga Village 23 Mar (NB, NYSARC). **Bald Eagle:** up to four present MNWR all season; two Tobehana L 11 Apr including one adult with yellow tag. **Golden Eagle:** *intro*, one Sene 18 Mar. **GYRFALCON:** one CM 1-29 Mar (mob). **Virginia Rail:** six MNWR 21 Apr; present Caton Swamp 16 May. **Sora:** three CM 19 Apr, present Caton Swamp 16 May. **Lesser Golden-Plover:** seven MtP 7 Apr. **RUFF:** ad MNWR 15-16 May. **W. Sandpiper:** one 17 May MNWR [?details - *The Editor*]. **Baird's Sandpiper:** one 17 May MNWR [?details - *The Editor*]. **Stilt Sandpiper:** one 17 May MNWR [?details - *The Editor*]. **Wilson's Phalarope:** one MNWR 25 May. **Red-necked Phalarope:** one MNWR 10 and 17 May [?details - *The Editor*]. **Bonaparte's Gull:** max 150 CL 25 Apr. **LITTLE GULL:** one Long Pt CL 25 Apr (NB). **COM. BLACK-HEADED GULL:** one 10 May Sheldrake CL (NB, AB). **Glaucous Gull:** one CL 20-24 Mar. **Iceland Gull:** three CLSP 21-28 Mar. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** one CL 10 Mar, 23 Mar. **Forster's Tern:** one Ithaca 19, 26 Apr. **Black Tern:** up to 14 Benning Pool MNWR 10 May; two Elmira and one Corning Pd 16 May.

Whip-poor-will: one near Ithaca 19 May. **Red-headed Woodpecker:**

three singles 2 to 16 May.

Olive-sided Flycatcher: one near Ithaca 18 and 20 May. **W. KINGBIRD:** one MtP 13 Apr (NB, AB, SI, NYSARC). **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:** one near Aurora 12 May. **Purple Martin:** three CL Basin 24 Apr, and on 16 and 18 May, only reports. **Bank Swallow:** colony of 50 Southport (Clements). **Cliff Swallow:** nesting on bridges in Southport and Elmira (Clements). **Fish Crow:** present Ithaca; two identified by call Elmira 30 Mar. **Com. Raven:** one Spencer Landfill 4 Apr, three Big Flats 11 Apr. **Sedge Wren:** single report MNWR 21 May. **Gray-cheeked Thrush:** one Bicknell's form Ithaca 20 May (KMcG). **Swainson's Thrush:** one 4 May, only report. **Cedar Waxwing:** hundreds present Penn Yan and Rts. 89/90 early to mid-Mar; few other reports. **N. Shrike:** one singing QCM 23 Mar (JB).

Yellow-throated Warbler: one near Aurora 25-26 Apr (NB, AB, AF). **Worm-eating Warbler:** one Horseheads 16 May (DC). **Kentucky Warbler:** one near Aurora 22 May (KD). **Yellow-breasted Chat:** one MNWR 8 and 20 May.

Am. Tree Sparrow: many reports from feeders last three weeks of Mar; last four SWS 28 Apr. **Fox Sparrow:** *intro.* **BREWER'S BLACKBIRD:** three males near CM 23-24 Mar. **Orchard Oriole:** pair Elmira 13 May, pair Sheldrake CL 16 May, one 18 May. **Red Crossbill:** one CH 18 May. **Pine Siskin:** scattered reports of one to 12 birds throughout the Region and period.

449 Irish Settlement Road, Freeville, New York 13068