

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

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The summer of 1994 was relatively uniform and dull over most of the State for both weather and birdwatchers. This was a season when the best records came from people studying newly accessible areas or checking specific breeding populations. Generally, it was considered to be a very good season for nesting birds.

This summer's temperature patterns were fairly uniform across the state. June started cool, had a very hot middle with a few to nearly fourteen days, with some record highs, above 90°F, and ended warm but more moderate. July temperatures averaged above normal everywhere, although it was noted as pleasant in the North Country. August was cool and wet across the State, a bit warmer in the western Regions, wetter to the southeast. Excepting only Region 3, precipitation in June generally ran slightly to a third below average. July was dry in the western part of the State, precipitation above average with lots of thunderstorms in the southcentral part, down slightly in the southeast, and about average in the north. The wet weather of August often occurred in cloudbursts, best illustrated by Region 10's report that NASS received more rainfall in a single 24 hour period than New York City recorded for the month.

The various assessments of impact of the weather on birds make interesting reading. Apparently Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow nesting was very successful in most areas, yet Regions 4 and 8 recorded Eastern Bluebird fledging reduced; the cold period from mid May to early June was blamed in Region 4, and Region 8 also noted some Tree Swallow nestlings baked by mid June's heat. The Region 1 report suggested that late June rains may have hurt ground nesters.

The heart of this season are breeding birds. The easiest way to catch most of the important news is via a walk through the checklist. Double-crested Cormorant experienced a complete nesting failure on Little Galloo Island in Region 6, apparently due to a crash in the Alewife population leaving insufficient food to raise the young. However, the nesting population was up on the Four Brothers Islands in Region 7 and nests were located for a first breeding record in Region 9. Bittern reports were up a bit, especially for Least Bittern. The Ironsides Island Great Blue Heron colony in Region 6 was down to 44 nests, a typical result for an aging colony. Great Egret numbers were good in Region 7 and one was observed in the Adirondack part of Region 5. Mute Swan continues

to spread and increase, with summer reports for Regions 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 10. Very high fledging counts were reported for both Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser at the Genesee Country Museum Preserve in Region 2. Blue-winged Teal remains of concern in most Regions, with Regions 3 and 5 noting the best counts. Northern Shoveler nesting was confirmed for a first time in Region 7.

Osprey, Bald Eagle, and Peregrine Falcon all showed substantial nest failure percentages; see the Region 7 report in particular. Yet Peregrine Falcon fledged young from a new, natural eyrie along the Hudson in Region 9 and also were hacked from two sites in Rochester in Region 2, with varying views on the prudence of this move. A few Northern Goshawk and Red-shouldered Hawk nestings were noted, with both still of concern as breeding species. The major nesting raptor positive was *Merlin* nesting recorded in at least three counties in Region 7, where they fledged a greater total of young than Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon combined! Mike Peterson's note that a rejected Breeding Bird Atlas period report may have been correct gives me an excuse to climb on a soapbox and caution that we should avoid close-minded proclamations relative to birding observations. One suspects that the rejection of the Atlas period report was partially due to the flat rejection of Merlin breeding reports in John Bull's *Birds of New York State*, where one rejection invoked "knowledge" that Merlin doesn't nest in cavities. Yet, the first Wisconsin nest, discovered in 1897 and published in an obscure book in 1902, was of a cavity nest. Certainly Merlin nesting has changed in New York and elsewhere in the Northeast in very recent years. They are too noisy while nesting to believe that they could have been overlooked if they were present in their current numbers. But surely, some of the records rejected in the past were correct.

Moving along to shorebirds, breeding notes are typically few, but the *Wilson's Phalarope* again was confirmed nesting in Region 7 and a first mainland New York nesting of *American Oystercatcher* in Region 9 are true highlights. Region 5 again noted the nearly complete destruction of the first complement of Common Tern eggs on Oneida Lake by Ruddy Turnstone; however, excellent fledging totals were reported from the second nesting attempt. Additional gull and tern notes include new Ring-billed Gull colonies in Regions 2 and 3 and a summary of a news report on the Great Gull Island colonies in the Region 10 report.

A Barn Owl nesting in Region 1 is a notable upstate, as was a nesting report for Long-eared Owl in Region 3. Both of our formerly common goatsuckers continue in trouble as breeding species over most of the state. Toward the edge of their range, Red-headed Woodpecker

observations dropped to zero in Region 4, yet increased in Region 6. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was found nesting in Region 9 well to the south and at lower elevations than previously known.

Among the nesting passerines, there was general concern for thrushes, warblers, and grassland species. The great diversity of nesting warbler species is noted in Region 3 and 9, and impressive counts came from a Nature Conservancy study in formerly closed pulp and paper lands appear in the Region 6 report. The many other notes relative to species, again mostly of concern, generally are too few for any given species to mark trends. Eastern Wood-Pewee was noted of concern in Region 6. Acadian Flycatcher numbers were up in Regions 3, 5, and 10. Concern was noted for both Bank and Barn Swallows in Regions 4 and 6. Common Raven sightings or nesting continues to increase in Regions 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9. As expected, Carolina Wren reports plummeted everywhere after last winter. A concerted effort to find grassland and wet meadow breeders in Region 6 brought impressive totals of Sedge Wren. Among the warblers we have the story with the "winged warbler" complex continuing to evolve, finally with no Golden-winged reported from Regions 3 and 4, a Blue-winged north into Region 7, and Lawrence's type hybrids noted in Regions 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, and 10; *Yellow-throated Warbler* found again in Region 1 and also in Region 3; *Prairie Warbler* reports particularly widespread; *Palm Warbler* probably nesting in both Regions 6 and 7; *Prothonotary Warbler* found in Regions 1, 3, 5, and 10; *Worm-eating Warbler* noted in Regions 3, 9, and 10, but not in Region 4; *Kentucky Warbler* sighted in June in Regions 3, 6, and 9; and *Yellow-breasted Chat* noted only in the Region 3 and 9 reports, though certainly the species also must have been present in Regions 10. *Indigo Bunting* was again flagged as of concern in Regions 3, 4, and 6. While the grassland sparrows remain of general concern, special efforts in several Regions produced impressive counts, including *Grasshopper Sparrow* in Regions 6 and 7, *Henslow's Sparrow* in Region 8, and *Vesper Sparrow* in Region 6. *Bobolink* numbers were reported down in Regions 5 and 6, but very high in neighboring Region 4. *Orchard Oriole* nesting was recorded in Regions 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, and 9. Finally, summering winter finches included *Red Crossbill* in Regions 1, 6, and 7; *White-winged Crossbill* in Region 7; *Pine Siskin* only in Regions 6 and 9; and *Evening Grosbeak* in eight Regions.

The tail of the spring migration provided a few more early June records than in recent years, generally of the expected late migrating flycatchers, thrushes and warblers. Very late records were noted for *Tennessee Warbler* in Region 6, *Cape May Warbler* in Region 4, *Lincoln's*

Sparrow in Region 2, and White-crowned Sparrow in Regions 2, 4, and 6. There also seemed to be a particularly high number of late spring reports of diving ducks on Lake Ontario, which extended into summer sightings for several species rare at that time and to early records for fall migration in August. A one man lake watch in Region 2 in early June produced impressive counts of White-winged Scoter and Red-breasted Merganser, but it remains to be determined whether this was truly unusual or simply represents the lack of observations during this time period. Elsewhere, Region 10 recorded a State record late for Common Eider.

At the opposite end of the season, the start of fall migration seemed slow, as it has for the past several years. Still, there were a number of passerines recorded at very early dates, including a Tennessee Warbler in Region 3 and an Orange-crowned Warbler in Region 5, for which it is assumed that very convincing details were provided to the Regional Editor. The eagerly awaited fall movement of shorebirds received mixed reviews, generally of low numbers. In most areas high water was noted as limiting shorebird habitat, yet some Regions reported good numbers to "the best in years" from the few spots available, while others noted only very low numbers. The Batavia Sewage Treatment Plant emerged as a new waterfowl hotspot in Region 1. Region 10 notes the impact on shorebirding of the completed beach improvement work at Cedar Beach. The best of the positives included a fallout of Upland Sandpiper and Buff-breasted Sandpiper on turf farms in Region 9, Willet in Region 5; Hudsonian Godwit in Regions 2, 3, and 10; Marbled Godwit in Regions 7, 9, and 10; Western Sandpiper in five Regions; Dunlin very early in Region 2; Wilson's Phalarope in Regions 3, 9, and 10; Red-necked Phalarope in Regions 1, 3, and 10; and Red Phalarope in Region 10; a few Olive-sided Flycatcher; Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in seven Regions; very high Tree Swallow counts from Regions 3 and 6; banding notes from Regions 3, 7, and 8; note of nocturnal call monitoring showing peaks on 20, 22, and 28 August in Region 3; and the start of the sixth season for the Franklin Mountain Hawk Watch in Region 4.

As is often the case, the summer selection of rarities was small. Among the more interesting reports were Tufted Duck and Trumpeter Swan, both of unknown origin, American Avocet, and *Yellow-throated Warbler* in Region 1; *American Swallow-tailed Kite* in Region 2; Snowy Egret and *Yellow-throated Warbler* in Region 3; Cattle Egret, Willet, and Prothonotary Warbler in Region 5; Snowy Egret, Little Gull, Boreal Chickadee, *Palm Warbler*, Kentucky Warbler, and *Orchard Oriole* in Region 6; Cattle Egret, Marbled Godwit, *Wilson's Phalarope* nesting,

Blue-winged Warbler, and European Goldfinch (origin?) in Region 7; *Black Vulture*, *American Oystercatcher* nesting, and Marbled Godwit in Region 9; and Manx Shearwater, *Audubon's Shearwater*, Eurasian Wigeon, *Wood Stork*, *Rufous-necked Stint*, *Sooty Tern*, and Prothonotary Warbler in Region 10. Searching for the B.O.T.S., I finally skipped all of the rarities and settled on the "we're-a-for-real-New York-breeding-species" *Merlin* in Region 7.

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Standard abbreviations: Regional rarities appear in *bold italics*; county names are shortened to their first four letters and appear in UPPER CASE letters; months are shortened to their first three letters. **In species accounts:** number of individuals omitted implies that one individual was reported; ! — details seen by Regional Editor; ad — adult; Alt — Alternate plumage; Am. - American; arr — arrival or first of season; BBS — Breeding Bird Survey; CO — confirmed nesting; Com. - Common; E. - Eastern; FL — fledgling; FY — adult feeding young; I — Island; imm — immature; *intro* — see introduction to report; juv — juvenile; L — Lake; max — maximum; mob — multiple observers; N. - Northern; 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; W. - Western; WMA — Wildlife Management Area; y — young.