

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON

ROBERT SPAHN

Summer of 1995 was hot, dry, and sunny over nearly all of the State from early June through August. Some Regions approached normal rainfall in August, but often through cloudbursts on just a few days. In the southeastern Regions, the drought deepened in August. An exception to the general pattern was Region 10, on its own in receiving above average precipitation in July but joining its neighboring Regions with virtually none in August, when a record of 24 consecutive days with no rain was set. Many Regions noted months hitting the top 10 all time lists for hottest, driest, or sunniest. It is not obvious from the reports that this weather had a great effect on many breeding species except perhaps marsh birds, because the marshes dried up. In many areas, mudflats were too dry for returning shorebirds and reports were well below normal. Comments noting that some wild food crops did not mature well in the heat suggest an impact on this winter's stragglers.

As usual, this summer's reports may be separated into late spring migrants, summering but non-breeding birds, early fall migrants, and the breeding populations. There were interesting notes in each category, but especially of breeding birds and rare summer visitors.

We can start with the stragglers from the spring migration, typically a few waterfowl, shorebirds, and passerines. Late to record late reports included Brant in Region 7, Pectoral Sandpiper in Region 7, American Pipit in Region 2, singing Tennessee Warbler in Region 9, Orange-crowned Warbler in Region 10, and Bay-breasted Warbler in Region 4. A bit harder to place is a June Western Kingbird in Region 10. Was it very late and very rare for spring or very early for fall?

The fall migration began with the first returning shorebirds in late June, then a trickle of warblers and swallows in July, swelling in numbers through August. Shorebird reports were highly variable across Regions, with few and low the most common adjectives. However, arrival dates were normal to even a bit early for many species and included a very early Purple Sandpiper in Region 7, a record early Stilt Sandpiper in Region 10, and Whimbrel in Regions 2 and 7, respectively. Other interesting notes included Western Sandpiper in Regions 3, 5, 7, 9, and 10; *Rufous-necked Stint* in Region 9; and record high counts of Willet and Short-billed Dowitcher in Region 10. Low counts were noted for Sanderling, Pectoral Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher away from the coast, and for yellowlegs in some traditional gathering sites. The

August arrival of warblers and other passerines has been weak for the past several years and was only a bit better this summer. Early movements were noted specifically in Region 10 and generally in Region 3. The only really early dates were Olive-sided Flycatcher in Region 2 and a record early Orange-crowned Warbler in Region 10.

Summer visitants added excitement to this birding season in many Regions. Highlights of two late July pelagic trips summarized in the Region 10 report include Manx and Audubon's Shearwaters, as well as Skua. Although Hurricane Felix stalled to the south of New York, it did pump huge waves north producing a great deal of beach damage in Region 10 and possibly tossed a few rarities that way, including a State first *Masked Booby*. Continuing with the rare visitors associated with water, we find *American White Pelican* in Region 5, Great Cormorant lingering in Regions 9 and 10, Glossy Ibis inland in Regions 3, 5, and 8, a wandering *Wood Stork* in Region 8; and straggling waterfowl including a blue and a white Snow Goose at Montezuma NWR in Region 3, Eurasian Wigeon in Region 10, scap in Regions 1, 5, and 9, Common Goldeneye in Region 5, and White-winged Scoter in Region 2. Interesting raptor reports included an August *Mississippi Kite* in Region 9; a Regional first *Swainson's Hawk* in Region 4; a first mid summer Golden Eagle in Region 2; and the now typical large count of juvenile Red-tailed Hawk past the Braddock Bay Hawk Watch in late August. A *Yellow Rail* called from habitat suitable for nesting in Region 7 and there was an exceptional burst of Laughing Gull in Region 2 in mid August. The continuing increase in Lesser Black-backed Gull on this side of the Atlantic was reflected in reports from Regions 3, 9, and 10. Early June saw a Regional first *Gull-billed Tern* in Region 9, then early July brought both Sandwich Tern and *Arctic Tern* to Region 10, and this subfamily was topped off by a *Sooty Tern* up the Hudson in Region 8 and a record count offshore from Region 10. Finally, summering passerines of note included *Blue Grosbeak* in Regions 5, 9, and 10; Dickcissel in Region 5; *LeConte's Sparrow* singing not far from the Yellow Rail noted above, again in habitat suitable for breeding, in Region 7; and a *Sharp-tailed Sparrow* in Region 8.

The heart of the season is the study of our breeding birds. You will find an encouraging increase in efforts to monitor populations. This season note a continuing project mapping warblers in Letchworth State Park in Region 2; nest box trails results for Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow in Regions 4, 5, and 8 and for Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser at the Genesee Country Museum in Region 2; grassland bird studies in Regions 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10, with encouraging numbers of Sedge

Wren, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Henslow's Sparrow in Region 6. A similar search of bog habitat in Region 6 in an area off limits during the Atlas period discovered an incredible 20 pairs of *Palm Warbler*; and summaries of summer census and BBS route compilations, though often in these cases the studies are too new or else no frame of reference was presented to allow making sense out of the array of numbers. Banding work also continues by many dedicated workers, with interesting notes including a Rose-breasted Grosbeak back for a thirteenth year in Betsy Brooks' nets in Region 1, the usual banding on 4 Brothers Islands in Region 7, and reports of Bob Yunick's continuing studies at Jenny Lake in Region 8.

Several major increases or nesting firsts include a jump to 7000 pairs of Double-crested Cormorant on Little Galloo Island off Region 6; a first inland nesting of Great Egret in Region 1, lost to human intrusion and vandalism; a first state nesting record for *Tundra Swan* (probably at least one of the pair injured) in Region 6; new Bald Eagle nests added in Region 1, on the Region 2/5 border, and in Region 8; Merlin fledged again in Region 7 and a probable new site added in Region 6; a Peregrine Falcon pair (no nest) in Syracuse in Region 5; a first Regional nesting of Common Tern in Region 9; and Lincoln's Sparrow at a new location in Region 8. Additional positive breeding notes include a few more reports of Red-shouldered Hawk in several Regions; Wild Turkey increasing across the board; Wilson's Phalarope back on territory in Region 7; both cuckoos in good numbers in the western half of the State; high counts for Yellow-bellied Flycatcher in Region 6; many new Cliff Swallow colonies in Region 9; a great post-breeding count of Barn Swallow in Region 5; the Common Raven expansion continued; Fish Crow continuing northward in Regions 5 and 8; Carolina Wren recovering a bit; a good count of singing Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Region 6; good counts of Veery in Region 3 and of Swainson's Thrush in Region 6; a good Yellow-throated Vireo count in Region 4 and of Red-eyed Vireo in Regions 4, 5, and 6; singing Tennessee Warbler in Region 7; Prairie Warbler noted in seven Regions; probable breeding Bay-breasted Warbler in Region 7; Scarlet Tanager counts up, a result of Project Tanager; good White-throated Sparrow numbers in Regions 1 and 6; Orchard Oriole nesting in Regions 1, 6, and 9; Purple Finch up a bit in Region 8; and crossbills and Evening Grosbeak noted in many Regions.

Negatives suggesting species to monitor in future seasons include low counts or significant decreases cited for Pied-billed Grebe, including no breeding records in Regions 2 and 8 and no sightings in

Region 4; both bitterns; Ring-necked Pheasant; Black Tern, which suffered a uniformly terrible nesting season across the State; Common Nighthawk, even low in migration counts this year; Whip-poor-will; Brown Thrasher; Golden-winged Warbler, with note of hybrid Blue-winged X Golden-winged Warbler located in eight Regions; and the grassland species, including even Savannah Sparrow, Bobolink, and Eastern Meadowlark.

Let's end on a few more interesting and positive notes. Imagine a Black Tern in Region 6 trying to drive off a Great Blue Heron, then an American Coot. Note a first record of double brooding by Tufted Titmouse in New York State, from the expansion area of Region 7 no less. And find note of possibly only the second documented use in North America of an artificial structure as a nest platform for Winter Wren in Region 8. Finally, the BOTS Award must go to the new species for the State list, the *Masked Booby* in Region 10.

Corrigendum: *Kingbird* Vol. 45:177 after **Yellow-throated Warbler**, change Region 8 to Region 9.

716 High Tower Way, Webster, New York 14580