

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON 1996

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The spring season and migration were delayed, as much as a couple of weeks, in all Regions, a bit less in Region 10. Leafout and the flowering of trees and shrubs were well behind normal to at least mid May in most Regions, through the season in some. All but the southeastern Regions experienced a Mother's Day snow storm, accompanying a frontal system which brought one of the best passerine fallouts in years to all Regions in the 10-13 May period. Another great wave of migrants arrived between 18 and 21 May in most Regions. This also brought a heat wave and record temperatures in the 90s in Region 10. The overall temperature pattern was quite similar all across the state, below average in all months, though Regions 2, 7, 8, 10 saw some relief in the April average. Precipitation fell well above average in all three months in western and northern Regions, with Regions 4, 7, 8, & 10 varying from this a bit in below normal March totals and average to a bit below for May. A persistent weather pattern across the central continent which drove this weather also blocked migration for long periods, with short breakdowns sending bursts of migrants northward. Generally, the weather was poor for birding and thoughts turned to "Silent Spring." Then the fallouts in May brought memories of days past to older birders and numbers not experienced before for many newer birders. In addition to the two major pushes noted above, Region 8 added 24 April, Region 10 added 29 April to 1 May, and Region 6 added 14 May. Major bonuses were the coincidence of the first May peak and the North American Migration Count and then the second peak also occurring on a weekend. Lest we become too excited over the big counts, read the Region 6 note relative to the rapid falloff in numbers in moving away from the immediate Lake Ontario shore, a note I have echoed in many recent years for Region 2. Continuing with the general, waterfowl were mediocre in most Regions, good in Regions 4 & 5, and shorebirds were poor in Regions 1, 5, & 8, but good in Regions 4 & 7. Rarities were swept into most Regions with the bursts of migrants.

Given the comments relative to the late spring, it seemed interesting to see whether these would be reflected in the arrival date tables, printed ahead. From Seasonality, note that the overall averages of the 93 species dates for 1996 compared with the 10-year averages (for the years since we have been specifically gathering these data) were late for all Regions

except Region 10, which was essentially on average. Region 4, to the south and east central was the next closest to average, the rest very late. There were 17 species whose average arrival date over all Regions was statistically significantly ($> 2s$) late, with Blue-winged Teal, Virginia Rail, Common Snipe, Am. Woodcock, Eastern Phoebe, Tree Swallow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Chipping Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, and Savannah Sparrow all averaging more than five days late. One can spend hours sifting through the table data looking for interesting comparisons, e.g. nearly all of the species with 10-year averages in March or early April averaged late this spring, but there was a good mix of early and late averages among those species expected in late April and early May. The search could continue across families or any other grouping of personal interest. However, I begin to wonder about the utility of stretching the exercise, especially given the limited sample size.

Departure Dates Seasonality and Advance

Region	Species Reported	Seasonality (vs 1987-1996, Days)	Advance (Days)
Region 1	92	2.23	-1.94
Region 2	92	3.60	-2.21
Region 3	83	2.96	-0.92
Region 4	85	0.18	0.35
Region 5	92	2.44	-1.36
Region 6	90	1.70	5.84
Region 7	90	2.50	6.45
Region 8	89	0.81	0.23
Region 9	77	2.71	-0.87
Region 10	80	-0.23	-5.57

Seasonality measures the average difference (in days) between this year's departure and the long-term average dates for the same Region. This season two values are given, one versus the average over all data going back through the 1961 issue of *The Kingbird*, the other relative to just the data gathered over the past ten years of compiling this table. *Advance* measures the average difference between this year's departure dates in a given Region and the departure dates averaged over all ten Regions. Negative values mean this year's number is early compared with the overall number.

In a careful reading of the Regional reports, there is so much interesting

data this season that it cannot all be covered adequately here. I urge you to read all of the reports in detail. Here we will first look at some of the major groups, then record numbers and dates, and finally rarities. Among the families or groups tracked in spring, we start with the loons and grebes, generally both reported in low numbers. However, note a good Com. Loon count of 1260 past the Hamlin Beach SP lakewatch in Region 2 and Red-necked Grebe in average or above numbers in all Regions, with peaks of 912 in Region 1 and a new state high of 2759 on 4 April past the Region 2 lakewatch. After many years of surging numbers, Double-crested Cormorant seems to have leveled off or dropped a bit in most Regions. Bittern, heron, and egret counts were generally low, though all of the rarer species were reported in at least one Region other than Regions 9 & 10. Among the waterfowl, special notes include: breeding of Trumpeter Swan in Regions 2 & 6 [Ed: Replace last year's breeding record for Tundra with Trumpeter in Region 6.]; Greater White-fronted Goose now regular, this year in four Regions; concern continuing over low numbers of Blue-winged Teal, Canvasback, and Redhead; good numbers for Eurasian Wigeon - six Regions, Ring-necked Duck, scaup, and scoters. The raptor picture is one of great contrast, the best spring recorded in 20 years of daily counts at Braddock Bay, with many daily and seasonal totals at record highs, and an average to a bit below year at Derby Hill. For most species the totals and peaks differ by more than a factor of two between these hawkwatches separated by only about 100 miles. Yet Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Red-tailed Hawk passed each location in roughly equivalent numbers with the Red-tailed peak actually higher at Derby Hill. Please see the individual Regional reports for the details. Among the breeding raptors in trouble, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Peregrine Falcon showed at least some gains; N. Goshawk brought no such good news. The trend to regularity of occurrence continues for Sandhill Crane, with 25+ birds reported from Regions 1, 2, 5, & 6. Shorebirds were generally poor, but there was a record high inland and spring count of 55 Willets in Region 1 and generally good variety in several inland Regions. Especially low numbers were noted for peeps, Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, Short-billed Dowitcher, and the phalaropes. Owls produced another big story, with Great Gray Owl found in Regions 1, 2, 5, 6, & 8, totaling at least 18 birds and with the latest at a state late date of 19 May in Region 1; two to three Boreal Owls were also noted by the owl banders at Braddock Bay in Region 2 and Long-eared, Short-eared, and N. Saw-whet owl reports were all up a bit and more widespread than usual. Common Nighthawk continues very

low statewide. Similarly for Whip-poor-will, except for a survey count of 42 in Region 6. For most passerine families, the comments are too few and scattered to assemble a picture of trends. Variable levels of aggregation among the counts reported also complicates attempts at comparison. Still, of special interest are: *many high counts* tallied in Region 5; Carolina Wren still low everywhere and Sedge Wren only reported from Region 6; thrushes generally poor, with the exception of Veery in Region 5 and Swainson's Thrush in Regions 1, 4, & 7 and a report of migrant Bicknell's Thrush from Region 2; Bohemian Waxwing late in several Regions and to a state late date of 19 May in Region 3 and abundant, including a high of 1500+ in Region 6 on 13 April; warblers, with some great counts, but often contrasting with lows in neighboring Regions, and with the rarer species widespread and nearly all found in multiple Regions; many reports of Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Indigo Bunting at feeders in the 10-12 May period; Am. Tree Sparrow and Fox Sparrow to May departure dates in four Regions each and Lincoln's Sparrow state record early in Region 4; big counts for Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, and Baltimore Oriole, all in Region 5; and finches in good variety, but generally low numbers, and both redpolls to late dates - Common Redpoll state late on 18 May in Region 4 and Hoary Redpoll, present in four Regions, to 17 April in Region 7. Once again, these notes only scratch the surface of this season's reports.

In addition to the record highs and special dates woven into the comments above, others include state record highs: Swainson's Hawk - three on 26 April in Region 2 and 15 there for the season; 78 Little Gulls on 5 April in Region 1 and 67 there two days later; 110 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds tallied in Region 5 on 18 May; 113 Hooded Warblers in Region 1 on 19 May; 50 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and 2000 Baltimore Orioles in Region 5 on 18 May; and 1,000,000 Red-winged Blackbirds estimated in Region 3 on 24 March. State record early dates were tallied for House Wren on 31 March in Region 3 and E. Wood-Pewee on 22 April, White-eyed Vireo on 28 March in Region 10, and Lincoln's Sparrow on 24 April in Region 4. Note that all of these early records represent some potential for identification error to the point of being excluded from consideration from John Bull's analysis for *Birds of New York State*, so are hopefully carefully documented in these cases. Record late dates include: Barrow's Goldeneye to 18 May in Region 5 and the Great Gray Owl, Bohemian Waxwing, and Com. Redpoll dates noted earlier. You will see from the bold dates highlighted in the arrival date tables that even this late spring provided a good number of record early arrivals relative to our ten years of tracking for these 93 species.

Finally, the number and variety of rarities across all Regions is the best in many years. Based on my criteria for selection, the total comes to 68 species, with over 175 total reports, some of multiple individuals. This is far too many to list all here, but nearly all should be in bold italics in the Regional reports. A selection of the best is: Western Grebe for two weeks in Region 5; a grebe identified as Clark's Grebe in Region 7, if approved by NYSARC, would be an addition to the NY State checklist; N. Fulmar in Region 10; Anhinga in Region 10; Tricolored Heron in Region 1; the nesting Trumpeter Swans in Regions 2 & 6; a Regional first Black Vulture in Region 6 (also reported, not as firsts, in Regions 2, 9 & 10; Am. Swallow-tailed Kite in Region 10; three Mississippi Kites in Region 2; Swainson's Hawks in Regions 2 & 5; a state first Eurasian Hobby in Region 10; Gyrfalcon in Regions 4 & 10; Wilson's Plover in Region 10; Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Region 10; Long-tailed Jaeger in Region 10; Thayer's Gull in Region 7; three Arctic Terns in Region 2; four Common Murres in Region 10; Black Guillemot in Region 10; the many Great Gray Owls; the 2-3 Boreal Owls in Region 2; Varied Thrush in Region 1; Yellow-throated Warbler in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6, & 10; Swainson's Warbler in Region 10; Summer Tanager in Regions 5 & 10; Western Tanager in Region 5; Painted Bunting in Region 5; Baird's Sparrow in Region 1; Le Conte's Sparrow in Regions 7 & 10; and Bullock's Oriole in Region 4. Even from a list like this, Eurasian Hobby stands out as the Bird of the Season, but not really far above the Clark's Grebe or the challenge of noticing and identifying a Baird's Sparrow this far out of range.

Yet another time I exhort you to read the Regional reports carefully. In addition to all the data, you can find interesting notes such as: Purple Finch calling like a Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Region 6 - ID by ear is far from foolproof; a heronry abandoned because an Osprey moved into a central nest in Region 7; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker defending its sap wells against Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Pileated Woodpecker, certainly size extremes, in Region 7; an excellent banding summary from Crown Point in Region 7; and a pelagic trip summary in Region 10.

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