

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON 1996

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The weather of the summer of '96 was relatively benign across the state, suggesting a good season for nesting birds. June was generally warm and wet, July cool and wet, and August average to cool and drier, though with no hint of the droughts of years recently past. In several Regions to the SE, nearly half of the high rainfall totals for July came from the tail end of Hurricane Bertha on the 13th. Only two Regions noted logging a single 90°F day, the rest not reaching that mark all season. The result was lush growth and abundant crops of seeds, nuts and fruits produced. Weather related negatives were the losses of Tree Swallow and E. Bluebird nestlings in early June and high water levels producing limited shorebird habitat. Late nesting after a cool, late spring led to some late fledglings in some Regions.

In contrast to the frequently dull summer seasons, Summer '96 produced a substantial number of both late spring migrants and early fall arrivals and a good number of exciting breeding records and midsummer stragglers. Looking first at the late spring migrants, we find many waterbirds tallied well into June, including: Horned Grebe in Region 8, Brant in Regions 7 & 8, Greater Scaup in Region 1, Common Goldeneye in Region 5, and Common Eider to 1 June and 15 June in Region 10. A Black Vulture passing Derby hill on 2 June was a summer season first for Region 5. Shorebirds straggled through to mid June, with highlights a Ruddy Turnstone on 13 June and White-rumped Sandpiper on 16 June in Region 3. Among the passerines, there were also many late records, with Philadelphia Vireo to 10 June in Region 4 and Blackpoll Warbler to 17 June in Region 3 the most notable.

Turning to the early migrants of fall, the same families provided most of the excitement. Early waterbirds included: a record early Eared Grebe on 29 August in Region 1; Horned Grebe, both scaup, Black Scoter, and Bufflehead in Region 2; and White-winged Scoter in Regions 1, 2, & 7. Baird's Sandpiper arrived early on 15 July in Region 10 to represent the shorebirds, and early passerines included Olive-sided Flycatcher on 22 July in Region 1, Ruby-crowned Kinglet on 18 August in Region 3, and Gray-cheeked Thrush on 7 August and Philadelphia Vireo and Blackpoll Warbler on 13 August in Region 4. In addition, migrant Merlins were sighted in August in five Regions and the season's first Parasitic Jaeger passed the lakewatch on Lake Ontario in Region 2.

Midsummer brought some of the real surprises of the season. First were the host of reports of birds rarely seen at this season, though still with no evidence of breeding. These included: Common Loon on the Finger Lakes and other larger bodies of water away from normal breeding locales; Great Cormorant at a beach site in Region 10; a single Snowy Egret in Region 3 and a record high inland count of three Snowy Egrets on 19 June in Region 7; four **Trumpeter Swans** in Region 3; Snow Goose in Region 7; Brant in Regions 4 & 7; many diving ducks scattered across the state, but especially noteworthy a female Tufted Duck in Region 1, a Regional first summer record of Ring-necked Duck in Region 4, and several Common Eiders in Region 10; multiple Turkey Vultures in Region 10; a 12 July record of Golden Eagle in Region 8; **Black Rail** calling on 16-24 June in Region 6; Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, and Short-billed Dowitcher either as summer stragglers or very early, late June, fall returns in Region 7; Little Gull on 4 July in Region 10; Lesser Black-backed Gull in Regions 1 & 10; Yellow-bellied Flycatcher banded on 1 July in Region 10; Ruby-crowned Kinglet on 18 July in Region 8; Clay-colored Sparrow in Regions 2, 4, 5, & 6; and reports of "winter finches," Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin, and Evening Grosbeak from six Regions each.

As noted earlier, reports indicated a good nesting season for most species, and the season certainly produced many positive notes of breeding increases and range expansions. Among the waterbirds we find: Double-crested Cormorant colony increases in Regions 1, 6, & 7 and a first nesting on the main body of Long Island in Region 10; a first successful inland nesting of Great Egret, with three pairs each fledging three young in Region 1; Trumpeter Swan nesting successfully in Regions 2 & 6 [Recent details from Steve Kelling suggest that these are probably dispersed offspring from an ongoing, private captive breeding activity near Montezuma NWR where many young have been raised for several years with none of these pinioned or restrained. It is highly likely also that last summer's swans nesting at Perch River WMA, thought to be Tundra Swans, were actually the Trumpeter Swan pair which nested there again this year. This same supposition applies to the imm. Trumpeter Swans wintering in Region 2 the past two years. [Do we applaud this introduction of another large waterfowl with no historical evidence of former breeding in this part of the continent?]; expanding Mute Swan populations - noted in 7 of 9 Regions reporting, definitely not applauded; increases in Am. Wigeon young in Region 1.

Raptor notes included: Osprey and Bald Eagle doing well in many Regions, though with some losses due to the mid-May snows in Region 7 and 3 of 4 nests unsuccessful in Region 8; breeding Merlin continuing to increase in

Region 7 and with a strong "Probable" for breeding added from Region 6; and Peregrine Falcon nesting spreading to include Regions 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, & 10, though no young were fledged from the eyrie in Syracuse in Region 5. Gulls and terns are doing well in the colonies in the east end of Lake Ontario in Region 6 and on the Four Brothers Islands in Region 7, as well as in Region 10, and Great Black-backed Gull produced a first nesting record for Clinton Co. in Region 7. Red-bellied Woodpecker was noted expanding to the south into higher country and Black-backed Woodpecker and other boreal specialties were located at a new site in Region 5. Among the passerines there are so many species that coverage among Regions is somewhat sporadic for any one, but the positives included: Fish Crow stable or expanding in Regions 3, 4, 5, & 8; the continued spread of Com. Raven, including a nesting on City Hall in Elmira, Region 3; Sedge Wren at six locations in Region 6; Prairie Warbler noted in seven Regions; increased numbers of Cerulean Warbler breeding sites; Hooded Warbler expanding to new breeding locations in Regions 1 & 5; Yellow-breasted Chat reports increased, with notes from Regions 2, 3, 4, & 6; some good grassland species counts where specific searches were carried out, including 72 singing Henslow's Sparrows in night surveys in Region 6 and four Clay-colored Sparrows on the former Plattsburgh Air Force Base in Region 7.

The breeding bird picture is not all rosy, there are still many species with reasons for concern. Among these were: continued low numbers of reports for nesting Am. Black Duck and Blue-winged Teal; few reports of nesting N. Goshawk and Red-shouldered Hawk; loss of some tern breeding colonies in Region 10; Black Tern still low, though some increases were noted in both Regions 5 & 6; both Common Nighthawk and Whip-poor-will very scarce in most Regions; Carolina Wren numbers still low; only a single Sedge Wren report outside of the Region 6 breeding areas noted above; no Loggerhead Shrike reports; continued decline of Golden-winged Warbler as Blue-winged Warbler expands and more "Brewsters's" and "Lawrence's" hybrids are noted in former Golden-winged breeding strongholds; the continued scarcity of many grassland species away from the study areas in Regions 6, 7, & 8; and few reports of nesting Purple Finch.

Much of the data for the Regional reports for this season comes from special studies underway in the various Regions, as many regular reporters are away on vacation or just don't study and report resident bird records. Among these, possibly providing ideas for projects of interest to birders in more Regions, are: a daily lakewatch from late August to early December and a study of breeding birds in a local park, with counts on a set route daily, in Region 2; an annual (2nd year in 1996) census in a CBC circle in Region 3; note of regular analysis

of the data from the eight BBS routes in Region 4 and a plea from the Region 8 Editor that observers there send her copies of their route summaries [This would be useful in all Regions, as the national summary data will never be available in time for the season's reports for *The Kingbird*.]; colonial nesting monitoring in Region 6; the annual Four Brothers Islands banding work and a concerted Palm Warbler survey effort in Region 7; long-term banding notes from Region 8; and pelagic trip summaries and colonial waterbird nesting observations in Region 10.

Finally, this summer found numerous rarities visiting the state. The best of these by Region were: Region 1 - Am. White Pelican, Anhinga, Snowy Egret, Tufted Duck, and Lesser Black-backed Gull; Region 2 - Trumpeter Swan, Mississippi Kite, Clay-colored Sparrow, and Dickcissel; Region 3 - Cattle Egret, Trumpeter Swan, Am. Avocet, and Buff-breasted Sandpiper; Region 4 - Brant, Ring-necked Duck, & Connecticut Warbler; Region 5 - Black Vulture, Willet, & Laughing Gull; Region 6 - Trumpeter Swan, "Krider's" Red-tailed Hawk, singing Black Rail, & Connecticut Warbler; Region 7 - Snowy Egret (3), Snow Goose, Brant, & Connecticut Warbler; Region 8 - Golden Eagle; and Region 10 - Manx Shearwater, Great Cormorant, Common Eider, Black-necked Stilt, Am. Avocet (several), Sooty Tern, Sandwich Tern (several), Williamson's Sapsucker, and Bullock's Oriole. The obvious standout among these for the BOTS Award is the Williamson's Sapsucker, a female netted, banded, photographed, and released on 22 Jun in Region 10. If accepted by NYSARC when submitted, this is a first for NY. According to the 6th Edition of the *AOU Check-list of North American Birds* (1983) the species had not been recorded east of the Mississippi River.