

REGION 1 - NIAGARA FRONTIER

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In 1995 the weather concern was drought. This year it turned to floods. That pattern continued into the fall, making September the second wettest in Buffalo weather history with 7.51" of rain compared to the normal of 3.49". The remnants of Hurricane Fran played a large part. However, lake effect rains dropped even more, especially north of Buffalo in the Town of Tonawanda, which received over 12" for the month! The latter half of October was also wet, driving up that month's total rainfall to 4.22", well above the average of 3.09". November's 2.99" of precipitation was almost an inch below normal, a nice change. However, at five degrees below the average, it was the sixth coldest November this century. September and October, on the other hand, were both within a degree of normal. While Buffalo recorded an average 10" of snow, Sherman in the southwest corner of CHAU had 40" on the 10-14 November alone!

The effects of weather on the distribution of birds are often ethereal. With hurricanes, though, the impact can be dramatic, or so we have read. This season the Region had a chance to experience, firsthand, the leftovers of Hurricane Fran which passed just west of our Region on 7 September. Though tropical systems in the past have deposited a (very) few storm-driven waifs into the Region (most records being in the form of specimens), Fran was the first to give birders an opportunity to see multiple individuals.

Much of the following is from a well researched article, "Hurricane Fran: September 1996" by Bob Curry (*Birder's Journal* 5(6): 283-297). **Although most of the sightings cited by Curry are believed correct, they are not included in the reports section unless they were supported by details of identification and location within New York waters, reviewed by this writer.** Because many of the birds were noted flying east with the wind, then back west onto Lake Erie, it is believed that most, at one time or another, made it to the head of the Niagara River before turning around. Thus, most were probably in our Region, if briefly, and therefore worthy of mention here. **Black-capped Petrels** were the main story of the hurricane. Many were sighted from Waverly Beach, Ontario on Lake Erie (one mile from Buffalo), usually only one at a time. A systematic search of Canadian beaches on the three weekends following the storm, however, turned up **15 specimens** within 40 miles of Buffalo. Only one was found on the New York side of the lake, the difference most likely due to the prevailing winds. The strong southwesterlies

blew two other weakened petrels right off of the lake into Niagara County where they were picked up and taken to rehabilitators. Neither survived. A juvenile **Sooty Tern** was seen from Jaeger Rocks, Ont., at the head of the Niagara River, and an adult from Waverly Beach, Ont., both 8 Sep. An adult specimen was recovered on the Canadian shore 30 miles from Buffalo. A **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** was sighted from Jaeger Rocks 9 and 13 Sep. Three were sighted from Waverly Beach 10 Sep. Unfortunately, only anecdotal evidence supports the Jaeger Rocks sightings as being in our Region. Laughing Gulls were observed in record numbers, including as many as five at the head of the river 14 Sep. Two were seen 9 Sep at Woodlawn Beach S.P., a new park on Lake Erie in the Town of Hamburg ERIE, and another was well inland at Countryside Sand and Gravel pits, CATT 8 Sep. All were in juvenal or Basic I plumage.

Whereas the preceding species were undoubtedly brought here by Fran, many other pelagic species in the area may have simply been stopped in their overland migration by the northward moving storm. The origins of the following birds have been much debated and there is no consensus. Record numbers of jaegers including: five **Long-tailed Jaegers** at Waverly Beach, Ont (RK!) and one at Buffalo, high numbers of Red-necked and Red phalaropes, Sabine's Gulls (including an extremely rare adult inland in CATT), a Black-legged Kittiwake, and an unfathomable **18,000** Common Terns at Niagara Falls 8 Sep (GC) kept the birding extremely interesting between sightings of the even more exceptional pelagics. The week of 8-15 Sep will certainly go down as one of the most exciting in Regional history, and it has local birders anticipating the next tropical storm to pass our way.

Concerning matters of greater long-term importance, the B.O.S. held its 61st Annual October Bird Count 13 Oct, compiled by Mike Hamilton, Gerry Rising, and Terry Yonker. The count area includes the Niagara Peninsula of Ontario and, unlike previous years, I have no breakdown for Region 1. However, most of the trends apply to our Region as well as to the entire count area. Significant all time highs were recorded for Double-crested Cormorants (898 vs. 846 in 1995), N. Shovelers (271 vs. 144 in 1994), Turkey Vultures (394 vs. 267 in 1995), and Common Ravens (14, all in ALLE and CATT where the species is actually becoming easy to find). A decade maximum of 147 Horned Larks was still down from the averages of the 50's and 60's. Decade minimums for species averaging over 100 were 53 Am. Kestrels, 313 Killdeer (lowest since the 1960's), 420 Herring Gulls, 19 Common Terns, 1166 Black-capped Chickadees, 1814 Am. Robins, 168 Chipping Sparrows, 22 Field Sparrows, 90 Rusty Blackbirds, and 820 House Finches (decade average 1569). Other significant counts were 240 scaup (lowest since 1971, decade average 5516), and 294 Ruddy Ducks (third highest ever and highest since 1950).

Species mentioned which are continuing trends suggested by previous B.O.S. count data are Double-crested Cormorant, N. Shoveler, Ruddy Duck, Turkey Vulture, and Common Raven on the positive side and Am. Kestrel, Chipping Sparrow, and House Finch on the down side.

Two inland sites continue to vie with the more heavily frequented Niagara River and Great Lakes for birders' attention. They are the now well-known Batavia Sewage Lagoons, which again attracted impressive numbers of waterfowl, and the Countryside Sand and Gravel pits. The latter is in an area of low birder density, but this season it produced Tundra Swan, Snow Goose, Sanderling, White-rumped and Baird's sandpipers, Laughing Gull, and an adult Sabine's Gull.

While most of the birds that were related to Hurricane Fran were not reported after September, jaegers were the exception with several later sightings on Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. These may actually have been later migrants rather than birds lingering since Fran. All three species were seen, including another **Long-tailed Jaeger**.

Though numbers of gulls on the Niagara River were not impressive this season, the variety certainly was, with 15 species reported. Highlights were the Region's third and fourth **Mew Gulls**, including one identified as of the nominate European race, a first, and multiple sightings of **California Gull**, involving at least three individuals. This is the fifth straight year for the latter on the Niagara River.

Yet a third new Regional record showed up during this remarkable season - an adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** at the feeding station of Jim Wojewodzki in the Town of Colden in Erie. Other highlights this season include a record late Least Bittern, a record count of Surf Scoters, Golden Eagle, Willet, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and Kentucky and Connecticut warblers.

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Abbreviations: BSL-Batavia Sewage Lagoons GENE: BOSOC-Buffalo Ornithological Society October Count, 13 Oct; BRBA-Buffalo Rare Bird Alert;

Chaut. L-Chautauqua Lake. CHAU; CSG-Countryside Sand and Gravel pits. T Dayton CATT; DH-Dunkirk Harbor, City of Dunkirk; INWR-Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge; NF-Niagara Falls; NPP-Niagara Power Project on Niagara River, Town of Lewiston; NR-Niagara River; Tifft NP-Tifft Nature Preserve, Buffalo.

LOONS-WATERFOWL: **Red-throated Loon:** arr T Wilson 13 Oct (WD!,MT), early; NR-NF 10 Nov (mob), rare away from L Ontario. **Com. Loon:** arr Woodlawn Beach SP 13 Sep, early; max 615 over Chaut. L T North Harmony 2 Nov (RPe), second highest CHAU count ever. **Horned Grebe:** arr Woodlawn Beach SP 13 Sep, early. **Red-necked Grebe:** none. **BLACK-CAPPED PETREL:** Buffalo 12,14,15 Sep (WD!,MM!,RA!,WW!); dead bird floating down middle of NR-Buffalo 14 Sep (RK!,mob); specimens to Buffalo Museum of Science - T Newfane 15 Sep, T Niagara 15 Sep, & Wendt Beach ERIE 21 Sep; first Regional records. **Wilson's Storm-petrel:** none documented in the Region as yet; *intro*. **Double-crested Cormorant:** max 1130 Buckhorn I SP 2 Sep (WW), another record for this species; 898 record for BOSOC. **Least Bittern:** Tifft NP 1 Sep; Tifft NP 28 Oct (BC!), record late. **Great Egret:** max. 11 BSL 1 Sep; last Oak Orchard WMA 27 Oct, later than usual; widespread in northern counties. **Green Heron:** last three BOSOC. **Black-crowned Night-Heron:** ALLE 13 Oct, rare inland. **ibis species:** INWR 11,13 Oct (BRBA). **Tundra Swan:** arr seven BOSOC; max 2500 over Chaut. L-Greenhurst 8 Nov (JC), very high count. **Mute Swan:** INWR 20 Oct (MM!), only report. **Snow Goose:** arr three INWR 5 Oct. **Brant:** 15 Barcelona Harbor CHAU 9 Nov and 50 DH 9 Nov, much less frequent on L Erie than L Ontario; 86 T Wilson 9 Nov, max counts. **Green-winged Teal:** 82 Burgeson Sanctuary CHAU 12 Oct, continued good numbers. **N. Shoveler:** 271 record for BOSOC, of which 268 were at BSL, record for one site. **Canvasback:** arr 55 NF-NR 17 Oct. **Redhead:** arr three BSL 5 Oct. **Ring-necked Duck:** arr 13 BSL 23 Sep (WW!), early. **Greater Scaup:** arr two BSL 23 Sep, early. **Lesser Scaup:** arr BSL 23 Sep. **Oldsquaw:** arr 22 T Wilson 12 Oct. **Black Scoter:** arr T Wilson 12 Oct. **Surf Scoter:** arr 16 T Wilson 12 Oct; record max 104, all males, Wilson 22 Oct (WD). **White-winged Scoter:** 600 T Wilson 12 Oct (WD), high count. **Com. Goldeneye:** arr four NR-NF 17 Oct. **Bufflehead:** arr NR-NF 17 Oct. **Com. Merganser:** arr two INWR 7 Oct. **Red-breasted Merganser:** BSL 1 Sep (GS), early migrant or summering. **Ruddy Duck:** arr seven INWR 26 Sep; max 250 BSL 20 Oct (MM), continuing high numbers at this site.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: **Turkey Vulture:** 394 record for BOSOC. **Rough-legged Hawk:** arr two T Yates and one T Charlotte 19 Oct, low numbers. **Golden Eagle:** imm T Somerset 26 Oct (WD!,mob), about the eighth fall record. **Am. Kestrel:** 53 BOSOC decade min, continued low numbers. **Merlin:**

Buffalo 14 Sep (MH!). only report. **Com. Moorhen**: last two INWR 6 Oct. **Am. Coot**: 3500 Chaut. L 5 Nov (FR). high count. **Am. Golden-Plover**: max 60 T Porter 21 Sep; last Woodlawn Beach SP 26 Oct. **Killdeer**: 313 BOSOC, lowest since the 60's. **Willet**: Olcott NIAG 8 Sep (SO.TO). rare. **Red Knot**: Woodlawn Beach SP 9-13 Sep. only report. **Sanderling**: CSG 8 Sep (BS). rare inland. **White-rumped Sandpiper**: Prendergast Point-Chaut L 7 Sep (KV). unusual inland; CSG 8 Sep (BS). second CATT record; two BOSOC; only reports. **Baird's Sandpiper**: CSG 8 Sep (BS). first CATT record; two DH 10 Sep. only reports. **Purple Sandpiper**: four NR-NF 30 Nov. only report. **Stilt Sandpiper**: BSL 6 Oct (JS). only report. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**: Woodlawn Beach SP 9 Sep (WD.BP). rare. **Red-necked Phalarope**: 12-1 Woodlawn Beach SP 9-21 Sep (mob); nine BSL 9 Sep (WW); Tiffit NP 12 Sep. hurricane related birds. **Red Phalarope**: two Burgeson Sanctuary CHAU 8 Sep (KV) and one Woodlawn Beach SP 10 Sep (WD!). hurricane related birds: Squaw I Buffalo 29 Sep (RA); Allegheny Res. 13 Oct (PY.BH). second CATT record. **POMARINE JAEGER**: two T Somerset 26 Oct (MM!.WD!); Woodlawn Beach SP 31 Oct (MT!); sixth and seventh records. **Parasitic Jaeger**: Woodlawn Beach SP 14 Sep (MT!) and Beaver I SP 15 Sep (PB!). both close focus views!; T Somerset 26 Oct (MM!). **LONG-TAILED JAEGER**: ad Buffalo-NR 8 Sep (AW!). first ever; imm Woodlawn Beach SP 31 Oct (MT!); five individuals were reported at nearby Waverly Beach, Ont. (RK!). **Jaeger species**: T Somerset 26 Oct; Shadigee ORLE 26 Oct; four Woodlawn Beach SP 31 Oct. **Laughing Gull**: NR-Buffero 8-15 Sep. max five 14 Sep (AW.WD!.MM!); CSG 8 Sep (BS!). second CATT record; two Woodlawn Beach SP 9 Sep (MM!.MT!); hurricane related birds. all juvenal or Basic I plumage, unprecedented. **Franklin's Gull**: NR-Buffero 5-15 Sep; Woodlawn Beach SP 31 Oct (MT). rare away from NR; NR-NF 10-16 Nov; only reports. **Little Gull**: arr NR-Buffero 8 Sep; good numbers NR thru. **Bonaparte's Gull**: below average numbers on NR. **MEW GULL**: Basic I NR-NF 10 Nov (SS!.BM!). first imm ever; *Larus canus canus*: Basic II NPP 17 Nov (JO.BCu!.RK!). first for this subspecies. **CALIFORNIA GULL**: ad NPP 10-23 Nov (WD!.mob); two ad NPP 24 Nov (WD!. mob). one with much darker mantle; a third individual found in Dec. **Herring Gull**: 420 BOSOC decade min. **Thayer's Gull**: all ages NPP and NF through Nov. **Iceland Gull**: arr NPP 3 Nov. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: imm NR-NF 3 Sep (WD!). early and a different age than bird observed here in Aug; probably over a dozen individuals on NR in Nov. all ages. **Glaucous Gull**: arr NR-NF 16 Nov. **Black-legged Kittiwake**: NR-Buffero 14 Sep (MM!). hurricane related; T Wilson 9 Nov (WD!); NR-NF 19.28 Nov (BC!.PY!.WD!). **Sabine's Gull**: one.three NR-Buffero 8.15 Sep (BH.WD!). hurricane related; ad CSG 8 Sep (BS!). first CATT record; ad Barcelona Harbor CHAU 2 Nov (RS!); rare away from NR and *adults are exceptionally rare*. **Caspian Tern**: Sunset

Bay CHAU 13 Oct (FR!), record late. **Com. Tern**: 18,000 Niagara Falls 8 Sep (GC), unprecedented [Hed: more details on area included and method of estimating would be appreciated for a number so far exceeding any historical data.]; 19 BOSOC decade min. **Forster's Tern**: 2-1 NR-Buffalo 10-29 Sep (mob), only report. **Sooty Tern**: none documented in the Region as yet. **Black Tern**: max 150 NR-Buffalo 8 Sep, still far below historical maxima at this site.

DOVES-WOODPECKERS: **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**: NF 29 Oct (SO!), second latest ever. **Snowy Owl**: arr T Ellington 5 Nov; many reports. **Barred Owl**: calling to captive bird Lyndonville ORLE 4 Sep (PS), extremely rare L Ontario plain. **Short-eared Owl**: arr T Cambria 15 Nov (SO), only report. **Com. Nighthawk**: max 154 Kenmore ERIE 3 Sep; last T Tonawanda 7 Oct. **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**: T Colden 12 Oct (JW), late, same feeder that held the Rufous. **RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD**: T Colden 4-23 Oct (JW!, mob), first Regional record. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**: arr away from breeding areas Goat I NIAG 5 Sep, early; last two BOSOC.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLING: **Horned Lark**: 147 decade max for BOSOC, but still down from 50's and 60's. **Barn Swallow**: last four BOSOC, continues trend of late sightings. **Com. Raven**: 14 record for BOSOC; becoming easy to find in ALLE and CATT. **Black-capped Chickadee**: 1166 BOSOC decade min. **Brown Creeper**: arr away from breeding areas four T Wilson & T Porter 21 Sep. **Carolina Wren**: none BOSOC, first miss since 1985. **Golden-crowned Kinglet**: arr away from breeding areas three T Wilson 21 Sep. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**: arr seven T Porter & T Wilson 21 Sep. **Gray-checked Thrush**: arr NF 10 Sep. **Swainson's Thrush**: arr away from breeding areas NF 10 Sep. **Am. Robin**: 1814 BOSOC decade min. **N. Shrike**: arr INWR 20 Oct.

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: **Yellow-throated Vireo**: last T North Harmony 24 Sep (KV), very uncommon in Southern Tier. **Blue-winged Warbler**: Buckhorn I SP 4 Oct (BC!), third latest ever. **Orange-crowned Warbler**: arr T Wilson 21 Sep. **N. Parula**: arr Tift NP 12 Sep. **Black-throated Blue Warbler**: max 10 Tift NP 15 Sep, high count. **Pine Warbler**: arr Tift NP 10 Sep. **Prairie Warbler**: T Amity 2 Sep, breeding site. **Palm Warbler**: arr Tift NP 7 Sep. **Kentucky Warbler**: 20 Sep (MD!), rare. **Connecticut Warbler**: Four Mile Creek SP 18 Sep (SO, TO), rare. **Mourning Warbler**: last two Four Mile Creek SP 18 Sep. **Com. Yellowthroat**: Burgeson Sanctuary CHAU 24 Nov (KV), very late. **Hooded Warbler**: last Evangola SP 22 Sep.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **Dickcissel**: female Jamestown feeder 22 Nov (WS, ph, RS), about the fourth CHAU record. **Am. Tree Sparrow**: arr Amity L ALLE 11 Nov. **Vesper Sparrow**: last Buckhorn I SP 4 Nov. **Savannah**

Sparrow: last 29 BOSOC. **Fox Sparrow:** arr three BOSOC. **Lincoln's Sparrow:** arr Tiff NP 1 Sep; last eight BOSOC. **White-throated Sparrow:** arr away from breeding areas four T Alfred 19 Sep. **White-crowned Sparrow:** arr two Four Mile Creek SP 21 Sep; L Ontario Plain through. **Dark-eyed Junco:** arr away from breeding areas T Wilson 22 Sep. **Lapland Longspur:** arr four T Porter 13 Oct. **Snow Bunting:** arr 50 T Yates 26 Oct; low numbers only. **Baltimore Oriole:** last Tiff NP 26 Sep (MH!), late. **Com. Redpoll:** over Buffalo 15 Nov (PY), only report. **Pine Siskin:** arr three ALLE 13 Oct, scarce. **Evening Grosbeak:** none.