SELECTED BIRD SPECIES IN NEW YORK STATE 1996 SUMMARY

Laura A. Sommers
Senior Wildlife Biologist, Nongame and Habitat Unit
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Wildlife Resources Center, Delmar NY 12054-9767

The following information was presented by Bob Miller at the Annual Meeting of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs in Colonie, NY, on 7 September 1996.

Long Island Colonial Waterbird and Piping Plover Survey

Piping Plovers, five tern species and Black Skimmers were surveyed in 1996. Piping Plover numbers continue to rise, although productivity remains low. From 1985 to 1996, Roseate Terns showed a significantly increasing trend, but Common Terns showed a significantly decreasing trend. Least Tern populations appear to be stable, although considerable management effort is expended on their behalf. Forster's Terns appear to be increasing and Gull-Billed Terns continue to nest in very small numbers (Sommers and Alfieri 1997).

Black Tern

Perch River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) had the highest number of pairs since the counts began in 1989; at Lakeview WMA the number of pairs was second lowest since 1990. Birds may have shifted between the two sites. Habitat measurements showed again that Black Terns select sites with an approximate 50:50 ratio of vegetative cover to open water, but the habitat model developed in previous years produced variable results in predicting where terns would nest. The terns utilized artificial nesting platforms at Perch River, but not at Lakeview. Nest success was lower for nests on platforms than on natural substrate, unlike last year and unlike the results of other studies. Trapping attempts were unsuccessful in 1996, therefore no adults were banded. At Perch River, predation was the cause of 60% of nest failures. In an experiment using mock nests, raccoons removed the "dummy" eggs most often (Mazzocchi and Hickey 1997).

1996 Summary For Selected Bird Species in New York State

Species	Location	Breeding Pairs	Active Sites	Productivity
Piping plover - overall	Long Island	256	65	-
Piping plover- monitored for productivity		145	35	165 fledged; 1.14 fledged/pair
Black Skimmer		490	18	-
Common Tern		18,852	50	-
Forster's Tern		38	3	-
Gull-billed Tern		3	2	-
Least Tern		3,093	51	-
Roseate Tern		1,668	8	-
Common Tern	Upper St. Lawrence River	600	29	791 fledged; 0.33-1.91 fledged/pair
	Oneida Lake	328	7	161 fledged; 0.49 fledged/pair
	Niagara Frontier	983	8	reproductive rate (r) = 0.59
Black Tern	Perch River WMA	77	-	44.5 % nest success (Mayfield)
	Lakeview WMA	12	-	45.5 % nest success (apparent)
Bald Eagle	Statewide	29	26	37 fledged; 1.38 fledged/pair
Peregrine Falcon	Upstate NY	11	11	14 fledged; 1.27 fledged/pair
	NYC Area	15	15	34 fledged; 2.27 fledged/pair
Osprey	Adirondacks	27	27	30 fledged; 1.1 fledged/pair
	Jefferson & St. Lawrence Counties	21	21	34 chicks counted

Common Tern

St. Lawrence River:

This region had the fourth highest number of nests since 1982; 69% of the nests were on navigation cells. On navigation cells, 1.91 chicks fledged per nest, while only 0.33 chicks fledged per nest on natural islands. Of 791 chicks fledged, 95% were from navigation cell colonies; the high success of navigation cell colonies is very important to sustaining inland common tern populations in NY and VT (Harper and Harper 1996).

Oneida Lake:

Productivity was low compared to previous years. Only 311 chicks hatched — this is the lowest number on record since monitoring began in 1979. Stormy weather for 9 days during the peak of the breeding season in 1996 prevented monitoring and caused significant chick mortality. In a habitat management experiment, herbicides were not effective in preventing regrowth of vegetation (Wang 1997).

Niagara Frontier:

In 1996, Niagara Frontier common terns had the highest number of breeding pairs and the highest reproductive rate since surveys began in 1987. The reproductive rate was calculated as the maximum number of chicks greater than ten days of age observed on one date divided by the maximum number of nests observed on one date. A new site (Niagara Falls Water Intake) was discovered this year (NYSDEC Region 9).

Bald Eagle

Record numbers of Bald Eagles were seen during the 1996 mid-winter count. A total of 174 birds was counted statewide, including 103 in southeastern New York (49 adult, 54 immature) and 24 along the St. Lawrence River (15 adult, 9 immature). Seven birds were captured, two adults and five immatures. One of these birds was fitted with a satellite transmitter.

New York's Bald Eagle population continues to increase; 1996 produced record numbers of breeding pairs and young fledged. Six new eagle territories were discovered, 2 each in southeastern New York, east-central New York and the Adirondacks. The Adirondack nests were found by ground radio-tracking of two males that had been captured and tagged previously. An eaglet born in captivity at a zoo in Salsbury, Maryland was successfully fostered into a nest in Livingston County.

Six Bald Eagles were recovered dead in New York in 1996. Cause of death was unknown for three of the birds, one adult found in Ulster County, one immature found in Dutchess County and one hatch-year bird found in Sullivan County. Of the remaining three, a nestling was found dead on the ground beneath its nest in Sullivan County, presumably blown out by a severe storm.

An adult was shot in Wayne County and an immature eagle was caught in a spring trap in Sullivan County and subsequently died from infection and malnutrition. Another adult bird which had been banded in New York was recovered dead in Vermont after being hit by a car (NYSDEC Endangered Species Unit).

Peregrine Falcon

1996 was also a record year for peregrines in terms of number of breeding pairs and number of young fledged. Peregrines had new nests on buildings in Buffalo and Rochester, resulting in the first ever banding of upstate urban falcons. There were also new nests at two sites along the mid Hudson River. A pair nested in Nassau County but did not produce any young (NYSDEC Endangered Species Unit).

Osprey

Numbers are from helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft surveys. One new nest was located on an island in the St. Lawrence River and three previously unused platforms were occupied by Ospreys in 1996. Plans to discourage Ospreys from nesting on navigation cell 156 on the St. Lawrence River were not carried out early enough to be effective. Three eggs had been laid before the first visit to the site. The chick count for Jefferson/St. Lawrence counties may be as high as 37; thick vegetation may have hidden chicks from view during the second flight (3 eggs were seen earlier in the season). In a cooperative effort, 15 Osprey nestlings were sent from eastern Suffolk County to the state of Ohio for hacking. Ohio has begun a 10-year project to restore Ospreys, which haven't nested there since the 1940's (NYSDEC Endangered Species Unit).

LITERATURE CITED

Sommers LA, Alfieri ML. 1997. 1996 Long Island colonial waterbird and Piping Plover survey. NYSDEC, Stony Brook, NY. 151 p.

Mazzocchi IM, Hickey JM. 1997. Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) investigations in northern New York, 1996. NYSDEC Region 6, Watertown, NY. 16 p.

Harper LH, Harper LJ. 1996. Common tern colonies of the Upper St. Lawrence River: 1996 status and reproductive success. Final Report to Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources, NYSDEC, Wildlife Resources Center, Delmar, NY. 29 p.

Wang JM. 1997. Breeding ecology and behavior of the Common Tern, *Sterna hirunda*. Cornell Biological Field Station - Internal Report. 11 p + appendices.

—