

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON 1997

WILLIE D'ANNA

2257 Cayuga Drive Extension, Niagara Falls NY 14304-4522

Although drier than average, the summer was pleasant and benign in all Regions. There were no tropical storms of note and the only real weather concern was a mild drought in several Regions that abated with a wetter than average August. Temperatures were normal to slightly less in most Regions, making for comfortable birding and, probably, improved nesting success for many species. The one negative was the impact of the dry weather on the wild food crop, which may be in short supply this fall and winter.

Like last year the cold spring held back several migrants into the summer period. In addition there were a number of early fall arrivals. Most noteworthy of the tardy group were Tundra Swan in Region 1, Glaucous Gull in Region 2, Am. Pipit in Region 5, Wilson's Warbler in Region 6, Red-necked Grebe in Region 9, and White-crowned Sparrow to 26 Jun in Region 2. Horned Grebes returned early in Regions 1, 2, 5, and 6. In Region 3 both Horned and Red-necked grebes stayed through the season. Other significantly early arrivals were Rough-legged Hawk in Regions 2 and 4, Palm Warbler in Region 4, and Am. Pipit and a very early Black-legged Kittiwake in Region 5.

There were a number of waterfowl species of interest this summer which are difficult to place in either early or late categories. After their record abundance of spring, it is not too surprising that Snow Geese were found in Regions 3, 5, and 6. More exceptional were a Brant in Region 8 and eiders - lots of them - off Montauk Point. The newfound abundance of wintering Common Eider spilled over through the summer with a maximum of 200. Four King Eiders joined them in mid-June. Other ducks of interest were both scaup in Regions 1, 2, 3, and 9; Lesser Scaup in Region 5 and Greater Scaup in Region 9; Ring-necked Duck in Regions 1, 5, and 8; Canvasback in Regions 3 and 6; Common Goldeneye in Regions 5 and 6; Bufflehead in Regions 3, 5, and 6; White-winged Scoter and several Ruddy Ducks in Region 1; and Black Scoter in Region 10.

The summer season is the time that shorebirds spend the most time in our state and when birders spend the most time looking for them. Unfortunately, only Region 5, and to a lesser degree Region 1, had a good season. Highlights in Region 5 were Willet, Whimbrel, Western Sandpiper, Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes, and Marbled Godwit. After the strong spring showing, Wilson's Phalarope showed up in five Regions. There was a possible state record count of Solitary Sandpipers in Region 1. Very rare were a Ruff, nearly annual in Region 10, and Am. Avocet in four Regions (1, 3, 9, and 10), the latter perhaps becoming more frequent.

Miscellaneous nonbreeding bird notes included some special pelagic species in Region 10 which regrettably will not be reported to the NYSARC; 171 Red-tailed Hawks doing their annual reverse migration along Lake Ontario in Region 2; a one-footed Black-headed Gull persisting (for how many years?) in Region 10; Little Gulls found in Regions 1, 2, 6, and 7; and an excellent Common Nighthawk migration in several Regions, though they are still in trouble as a breeding species in the state.

The real news of importance in the summer season, of course, involves our breeding birds. It is when we can get our best estimates on how various species are doing. Special efforts were made on a number of groups and individual species. Studies showed decreases in Double-crested Cormorant in Regions 6 and 7 and a slight increase in Region 1. The potential damage that cormorants can cause to their nest habitat, negatively affecting other species and themselves, was noted in Regions 1, 7, and 9. DEC personnel are working to control their population in Region 6 and are considering similar efforts in Region 1. Expanding in Region 10, cormorants there may be scouting for potentially new colonies. Grassland species are receiving more attention. Surveys found more than expected Grasshopper and Vesper sparrows in some Regions. This group of birds was found using landfill caps, specially managed for them, in Regions 1 and 5, and military bases in Regions 6, 7, and 8. Impressive counts of Grasshopper Sparrow were made in Region 10.

Cerulean Warblers were the focus of a Cornell Lab study carried out in several Regions, with some impressive counts in Regions 3, 5, & 7 and previously unknown breeding locations found. Details of this study reportedly will be published in a future issue of *The Kingbird*. Bog-sloggers in Regions 6 and 7 noted a veritable explosion of "Yellow" Palm Warblers (*Dendroica palmarum hypochrysea*). During the Atlas only one confirmed and one probable breeding records were found in just one block. This year 28 singing males were counted in Region 6 and about 10 in Region 7! It should be noted, however, that some of these areas were inaccessible during the Atlas project.

There were many other breeding notes of interest. Great Egret nested for the third straight year in Region 1, the only non-coastal site in the state. The Region 6 Trumpeter Swans, products of some (re?)-introduction program, raised seven cygnets. The pair was aggressive toward Mute Swans and kept them out of their territory. An impressive count of 1280 Wood Ducks in Region 5 shows they continue to prosper. Red-breasted Merganser made a failed nesting attempt in Region 7. Faring better were Am. Wigeon in Region 1, Ring-necked Duck in Region 6, and Common Goldeneye in Region 7.

Osprey and Peregrine Falcon had generally positive nesting seasons. Bald Eagle nested along the Hudson River for the first time in this century. Merlins are consolidating their foothold in the state, with several breeding pairs in the Adirondacks. Broad-winged Hawk was not on my list of possible future breeding species in New York City. They not only tried there but were

successful in the borough of Staten Island, RICH! Also adapting to New York City environs, this time in the middle of Mahattan on apartment buildings bordering Central Park, two pairs of Red-tailed Hawks successfully brought off young. N. Goshawk was found in six Regions, an improvement. King Rail was found in Regions 2 & 9, confirmed breeding in the latter. Sandhill Crane continued in an inaccessible site in Region 2, but breeding remained unconfirmed. Wilson's Phalarope nested again in the Region 7 pasture. Common Terns were hurt by high water levels in Region 6. Short-eared Owls, confirmed breeding in Region 6, were also found in Regions 2 & 7. N. Saw-whet Owls were found away from the Adirondacks in Regions 3 & 4. Common Nighthawk and Whip-poor-will continue to fare poorly as breeders in New York.

Yellow-bellied Flycatchers were in record numbers for Region 4 and expanding in the northernmost part of Region 7. House Wren and Yellow Warbler in Region 5 and Prairie Warbler in Region 1 had late nestings. Blue-winged X Golden-winged Warbler hybrids seem to be easier to find nowadays. "Lawrence's Warbler" was reported in Regions 1, 2 & 5. Two male Yellow-throated Warblers continued in Region 9 with no further evidence of breeding. Bay-breasted and Wilson's warblers in Region 7 are both very rare breeders. Yellow-breasted Chats were found in Regions 1, 8, 9, and, most improbably, in Region 6.

Clay-colored Sparrows may be on the increase. They were found in Regions 1 and 8 and at an impressive five sites in Region 6. Red Crossbills probably bred in Regions 1 & 7.

Winter finches dropped hints of things to come in the fall. Red Crossbills were found in Regions 1, 3, 5, 6, & 7. White-winged Crossbills were in Regions 7, 8, & 9. Pine Siskin was found in Regions 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, & even 10. Evening Grosbeaks were in Regions 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, & 9.

The best of the many rarities, by Region, were: Region 1 - two Eared Grebes, the first acceptable Regional summer record, Am. White Pelican, and Lesser Black-backed Gull; Region 2 - White-winged Tern found by the same person in the same site as in 1991 (!) and Lark Sparrow; Region 3 - Cattle Egret, Sandhill Crane eating from a bird feeder (!), and White-eyed Vireo; Region 5 - Am. White Pelican; Region 6 - first Regional Black Vulture and Fish Crow and the second Regional Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, very out of season; Region 7 - Swainson's Hawk; Region 8 - Glossy Ibis and Barn Owl; Region 9 - Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow; and Region 10 - Leach's Storm-Petrel, Band-rumped Storm-Petrel (first state record, if reported to NYSARC and accepted by that body), Long-tailed Jaeger, Yellow-throated Warbler, Dickcissel, Lark Sparrow, and Eurasian Collared Dove (another state first if origin is considered "wild"). This latter species has probably spread to the U.S. from the Bahamas, where it was introduced (Smith, 1987). Eurasian Collared-Doves have shown an impressive ability to expand in Europe and have been documented in several

states in just the past couple of years. Brace yourselves for another alien invasion. My choice for Bird of the Season is the well documented Lewis' Woodpecker in Region 4, only the second ever for the state. This record was already detailed in the previous issue of *The Kingbird* (Crumb and Cesari, 1997).

LITERATURE CITED

- Crumb DW, Cesari DJ. 1997 Sep. Lewis' Woodpecker in Richfield Springs, Otsego County. *The Kingbird* 47(3): 182-183.
Smith PW. 1987 Winter. The Eurasian Collared-Dove Arrives in the Americas. *American Birds* 41(5): 1370-1379.

=

Standard abbreviations: Regional rarities appear in *bold italics*; county names are shortened to their first four letters and appear in UPPER CASE letters; months are shortened to their first three letters. **In species accounts:** number of individuals omitted implies that one individual was reported; ! — details seen by Regional Editor; ad — adult; Alt — Alternate plumage; Am. — American; arr — arrival or first of season; BBS — Breeding Bird Survey; CBC — Christmas Bird Count; CO — confirmed nesting; Com. — Common; E. — Eastern; FL — fledgling; FY — adult feeding young; I — Island; imm — immature; *intro* — see introduction to report; juv — juvenile; L — Lake; max — maximum; mob — multiple observers; N. — Northern; NYSDEC — New York State Department of Environmental Conservation; NWR — National Wildlife Refuge; NYSARC — report to New York State Avian Records Committee; P — Park; Pd — Pond; ph — photographed; Pt — Point; Res — Reservoir; SP — State Park; spm — specimen; subad — subadult; T — Town of; Twn — township; W. — Western; WMA — Wildlife Management Area; y — young.

REPORTING DEADLINES

Winter Season: December, January, February

Deadline is 7 March

Spring Season: March, April, May

Deadline is 7 June

Summer Season: June, July, August

Deadline is 7 September

Fall Season: September, October, November

Deadline is 7 December