

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON 1997

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The fall of 1997 was generally pleasant, with few weather events to produce fallouts or other special bird concentrations. Sy Schiff in the Region 10 report noted the fewest hurricanes in many years. Only the rainy or wintry weekends of November might have interfered with birders' plans. Temperatures were generally cool across the state all season, slipping to downright cold at 2.5 to 4°F below normal in November. Precipitation ran close to normal in September over most of the state, with Region 2 a bit wetter than most and Region 10 at half normal. In October it was dry everywhere. November precipitation totaled 1/2 to 1 inch above normal across the state, and was marked by a heavy, widespread snowfall on the 14th. As we were to hear for the rest of the fall and winter, El Niño was assigned the blame for nearly all variations in the weather.

Given the generally pleasant fall, one might have expected many lingering birds and late departure dates. However, passerine numbers reported were generally low and departure dates average to early. For the species tracked in the departure date tables, most Regions averaged 1-5 days later than the average of the previous 11 years, while they were farther yet earlier than last year's averages. Exceptions were Regions 4, 7, & 10, where average departures ran late compared with the long term. Very late departures included Greater Yellowlegs, Sanderling, Pectoral Sandpiper, Common Tern, Yellow Warbler, and Baltimore Oriole. On the flip side, very early departures included Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Veery, Brown Thrasher, N. Waterthrush, and Canada Warbler, plus several species not even recorded in this season in some Regions. Continuing the look at dates of interest, state record early fall arrivals included California Gull in Region 1 and Hoary Redpoll and Pine Grosbeak in Region 2. Record late departures were set for Veery (Clinton Co.) in Region 7 and Townsend's Warbler and Cerulean Warbler in Region 10. There were only 11 Regional record late departure dates which you can find bold-faced in the date table.

Looking through the checklist at the groups we track during fall migration, the waterbirds appear first and provided major highlights for most Regions. Region 2 implemented a paid lakewatch position with standardized coverage. The more complete coverage, plus several observers with the new Kowa 874 scopes and El Niño effects, produced a host of large counts and rare birds summarized in that Region's report. The continued loon watch in Region 3 notched another record high for Common Loon at 5671 on 10 November. The bar was also raised for Red-throated Loon in Region 2, with 2777 on 25 November and with 7 days in November with counts above 1000 individuals. Among the grebes, Horned Grebe numbers were not particularly high, but Red-necked Grebe was well represented and Eared Grebe was found in Regions 1 &

2. Double-crested Cormorant numbers continue high across the state and Great Cormorant was noted far inland on Lake Ontario in both Regions 2 & 5. Heron and egret numbers were generally sparse, but Am. Bittern was recorded in six Regions; Great Egret counts exceeded 10 in seven Regions, with 2 even in Region 7; Tricolored Heron remained to 26 November in Region 10; Cattle Egret appeared in Regions 1 & 9; and a Glossy Ibis was located as a first in Livingston Co. in Region 2. Among the waterfowl, interesting notes include: Snow Goose in good numbers in most Regions; a Ross's Goose in Region 1; Brant only fair in most Regions, good in Regions 3, 4, & 7; Mute Swans booming, with reports from six Regions; record high Wood Duck counts noted for Regions 5 & 9, reaching 2397 on 8 October in the latter; Eurasian Wigeon appearing in Regions 7 & 8 in addition to their downstate strongholds; and Ring-necked Duck counts remaining high. Eiders provided much excitement at the Region 2 lakewatch, with the total of 16 Common Eiders nearly equaling the Region's historical total and 40 King Eiders eclipsing the normal 1-2 for a season. King Eiders were also noted in Regions 1, 6, & (of course) 10. On 7 November, an inland-unprecedented 11,635 Black Scoters were totaled at this lakewatch, about 90% of the season's total. Interestingly, good counts for Black Scoter were also noted in Regions 4, 5, & 6 on about the same date. Finally, Ruddy Duck was particularly widespread and in good numbers, with a Regional high of 1139 recorded in Region 1. Overall, of the 18 notable high counts for the fall season, 14 of these were for waterbird species.

The fall hawkwatch data was not as thoroughly summarized as usual this year, but you will find data for the Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch in the Region 4 report, a table for the Camp Pinnacle Hawkwatch in the Region 8 report; brief comments in the Region 9 report; and some comparative notes between the beaches and Central Park in the Region 10 report. Generally the flights were poor, particularly along the beaches. Well inland, the totals were considered poor except at the revitalized watch in Region 8. Interestingly, the more inland watches of Region 9 were termed poor and the more coastal good, while Region 10 saw the Long Island beaches deserted and Central Park counts relatively better. Of further note, only the record high for Merlins at Franklin Mt. And the lack of any sign of a Rough-legged Hawk irruption caught my attention.

The shorebird migration too was lackluster across the State. Peak numbers for most species were dismal. As usual, there were still the few interesting notes, including: Am Golden-Plover numbers in Region 10 and presence in Region 6; Willet in Regions 3 & 7; Hudsonian Godwit in Region 7; and Am. Avocet in Regions 1 & 10. Departure dates were generally early, with exceptions Regional late dates for Black-bellied Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, and Least Sandpiper in Region 4; Semipalmated Sandpiper in Region 7; Pectoral Sandpiper in Region 8; and Am. Avocet in Region 1.

Jaeger counts remained fairly high at the lakewatch in Region 2 this fall, a good Pomarine Jaeger count was noted in Region 10, and a Parasitic Jaeger in

Region 7 was highly unusual. Gull numbers were off at the Niagara Falls super hotspot, but California Gull set an early arrival record on 20 September and a number of odd hybrids kept the experts searching and debating. Elsewhere, gulls of special interest included: Franklin's Gull in Region 6; Black-headed Gull in Regions 2 & 7; California Gull in Region 2; Thayer's Gull in Region 7; Sabine's Gull in Regions 1, 2, 3, & 10; an imm. Ross's Gull on two dates in Region 2; and the great "Mew" Gull debate from Region 10 (look for future commentary in coming issues). Among the terns, the first Forster's Tern in 20 years appeared in Region 4, good Common Tern counts were noted in Regions 5 & 6, and Royal Tern tarried to a very late 16 November in Region 10.

The overall landbird migration picture was on the discouraging side. There were no owl irruptions, only a few scattered Snowy Owl reports for the season and many notes of low numbers for the other species, except for the record highs for Great Horned and Barred owls on the Region 1 annual October Count. Barn Owl in Region 8 provided another small bright spot. Common Nighthawk numbers remain very low and Whip-poor-will was not reported. Woodpeckers would have matched the dismal levels of many other families except for the Black-backed Woodpeckers viewed by many in Region 7 on field trips at the FNYSCB convention and the cooperative Lewis's Woodpecker in Region 8 in late November.

The huge passerine block of species produced more notes of concern over low counts and generally early departure dates. As always, there were bright spots to buoy hopes to be found in nearly every family. The flycatchers saw a late Least Flycatcher in Region 3 and Western Kingbird in Regions 2 & 10. For the vireos, Red-eyed Vireo lingered to 11 November in Region 9. Fish Crow and Common Raven continue to spread and increase. Gray Jay and Boreal Chickadee were located by most convention birders in Region 7. N. Rough-winged Swallow was tallied in good numbers in Region 1. Carolina Wren showed some signs of rebound and Sedge Wren was noted in Regions 2, 5, & 10. Northern Wheatear appeared in Region 10 and there were even some good night counts of thrushes in spite of no good groundings. Bohemian Waxwing appeared in small numbers in Regions 1, 2, & 6. Among the warblers, high counts were noted for Magnolia in Region 4, Pine (100) in Region 7, and Palm in several Regions. November departure dates were noted for Nashville, Yellow, Cape May, Black-throated Green, and Blackpoll in Region 10; and special rarities included Townsend's in Region 10, Worm-eating in Region 5, Kentucky in Region 10, and Yellow-breasted Chat in Regions 2, 4, 8, & 10. Of special concern is widespread note of low or zero counts for Black-and -white Warbler for the season. The sparrows were well represented by the usual scattering of rarities across most Regions. The best were: Clay-colored Sparrow in Regions 5 & 10; Henslow's Sparrow in Regions 5 & 9; Dickcissel in Regions 2, 9, 7 10; and Lark Sparrow in Regions 9 & 10. Yellow-headed Blackbird was reported in Regions 3 & 10. Finally, the winter finches were nearly all reported

from nearly all Regions, in spite of reports of limited or poor wild food supplies. Arrival dates were often early, but stays brief as numbers dropped by season's end in many locales. Of special note are the very early Pine Grosbeak noted earlier and Hoary Redpoll in Regions 2, 6, & 7.

As always, the Regional reports include much commentary, some enlightening, some just fun. To whet your appetite, a few examples are: the October count summary and hybrid gull notes in Region 1, Gray-cheeked vs Bicknell's thrushes in Region 2, the 1st annual Montezuma Muckrace in Region 3, a new county bird book published and an interesting band return in Region 7, the hawkwatch table in Region 8, and the Mew Gull debate and notes on sharp-tailed sparrows in Region 10. With your seasonal reports to your Regional Editors, you can supply comments and stories they can use to add spice to their editorial commentary.

Once again, the finale will be the selection of the bird of the season. There are several birds which might have been hands down winners a few years ago as firsts for the State, but now have slipped into the "just rare" group. Thus the BOTS Award for the season must go to Region 8's Lewis's Woodpecker, the third record for the species for the state, following on the heels of the one this spring which was, unfortunately, seen only by a few.

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Fall Departure Seasonality and Advance			
	Species	Seasonality	Advance
Region	Reported	vs 1987-1997	(Days)
1	59	-1.3	4.45
2	62	-1.59	4.10
3	57	-4.86	-3.55
4	52	4.27	0.40
5	62	-4.10	-1.92
6	52	-5.53	-10.79
7	49	4.1	-7.36
8	56	-1.06	-1.59
9	6	----	----
10	46	6.04	16.29