

REGION 10-MARINE

SEYMOUR SCHIFF

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We can blame everything on El Niño. Everything that happens out of the ordinary is blamed on it. This fall had the fewest hurricanes in years and few well defined frontal systems. The fall was colder than normal, but contained fewer extremes. As a result we had no freezing spells and no exceptionally warm periods, just a bland cool stretch with almost half the usual amount of rain in September and October and somewhat more than normal in November. The lack of extreme cold resulted in many late, insectivorous migrants. See the last dates for warblers.

November exhibited our usual 6 one-half day weather cycle of two days of rain, five days clear. November rain fell on the weekends; thus, restricting birding for most. The late weekend storms did offer an opportunity to some.

The former Fort Tilden Army Base, which is now a park, occupies about two and a-half miles of the roughly four miles of the Rockaway Peninsula that lies west of the Marine Parkway Bridge. There are prime ocean-viewing spots from bluffs within the area, which should be visited in easterly and northeasterly blows to view storm-driven pelagic species. Then a couple of miles further west, Breezy Point, the western tip of the peninsula affords more opportunity for pelagics. This area has remained a largely ignored resource, a situation which should change as birders find that access to the former army base is no longer restricted. Regular visits during inclement weather should have its rewards, as the few records listed in this species account would seem to indicate.

Along the beaches this turned out to be a poor season for both hawks and "dickey" birds. In September and October no sustained flight patterns emerged, and no sustained sequences of fronts were moving through. This lack of the "proper wind patterns" certainly contributed to the lackluster season along the outer beaches. The Fire Island Hawkwatch reported dismal results. Northern Harriers, Sharp-shinned Hawks, American Kestrels and Merlins were substantially down; Ospreys and Peregrine Falcons continue to do well, a bright spot in an overall alarming and very poor picture. Results from the Central Park Hawkwatch, which shares a distribution pattern with the mainland, were not available from prior years for comparison. As the data show, vultures and buteos tend to migrate to the west and falcons along the beach.

The Fire Island Hawkwatch at Robert Moses State Park tallied the following raptors between 10 September to 20 November. Data are from Drew Panco.

Ospreys 234, Bald Eagles 2, Northern Harriers 108, Sharp-shinned Hawks 383, Cooper's Hawks 18, Red-tailed Hawk 1, American Kestrels 1224, Merlins 805, Peregrines 140, TOTAL: 2915.

The New York City Hawkwatch, located atop Belvedere Castle in the middle of Central Park, tallied the following raptors between August 15 and December 15, 1997. Data are from Bob Decandido.

Black Vultures 3, Turkey Vultures 137, Ospreys 459, Bald Eagles 18, Northern Harriers 33, Sharp-shinned Hawks 1212, Cooper's Hawks 109, Northern Goshawks 2, Red-shouldered Hawks 30, Broad-winged Hawks 4646, Red-tailed Hawks 117, Golden Eagle 1, American Kestrels 215, Merlins 23, Peregrines 15, Unidentified accipiters 31, Unidentified buteos 14, Unidentified falcons 13, Unidentified raptors 94, TOTAL: 7172.

Angus Wilson and Andy Guthrie, in a report of three Eurasian Wigeons at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge on 11 October, pointed out that one of the two males is probably a hybrid "based on its American Wigeon-like flank pattern". Hybrids of the two species are now well documented on the West Coast. We should look more closely at any Eurasian Wigeon which occurs in the State.

Anyone who thinks gulls are dull can now read about the so called "**Mew Gull**" altercation. On Sunday, 23 November 1997 while birding in Jones Inlet from the Point Lookout side, Manny Levine, accompanied by your Regional editors, discovered a small post second-summer gull which appeared to match the description of a Mew Gull. Monday drew a large group of birders, some of whom confirmed this identification. By Tuesday additional birders arrived, but some had reservations. The bird in question, although sufficiently distinct from a Ring-billed Gull to be easily picked out of a group of mixed species, was not perfectly identical to a "typical" Mew Gull. The variability of both species and their similarity to each other is well known and these facts have compounded the problem. At the end of the reporting period the controversy remained. The nays, yeas and undecided include knowledgeable birders in each column. As of the end of the season, the bird remains; the controversy remains. Reports have been sent to NYSARC and others are in preparation.

A bright adult female or young male **Townsend's Warbler** was found at Montauk Pt on the extraordinary date of Sunday 30 November by Jeff Kingery and Claudia Leff and was subsequently seen by Joan Quinlan, Hugh McGuinness and Patricia Lindsay.

This season was the first to fully test the fall status of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows in our marshes. Generally, it's a daunting job to uncover a marsh sparrow, and then make out the differences from our local breeding subspecies. We have reports from mid September to mid October for the "new" species. The Nelson's now appears to be a common migrant. We have yet to see what the Christmas count results will be.

The invasion of northern species started this year with an incursion of finches in quantities that have not been seen in many years. Then, both King Eider and

Common Eider arrived along with the usual Harlequin Ducks at the Pt Lookout jetties in late November (numbers of eiders are relatively scarce this far west on Long Island). More Kings were in evidence here, early in the winter season, than had been seen at Montauk all of last year. For the finches this has turned out to be the great "fly-through" invasion. No birds appear to have stayed, but there were considerable numbers of Purple Finches; some Red Crossbills; many White-winged Crossbills; Common Redpolls; Pine Siskins; numerous American Goldfinch and even a few Evening Grosbeaks. Almost all were seen along the outer beaches, mostly early in the morning.

Best birds of the season: **Black Vulture** in Central Park, possible **Mew Gull**, **Sabine's Gull** well off Montauk Pt, **Northern Wheatear** on SI for too short a visit, **Townsend's Warbler** at Montauk and the LARGE numbers of northern finches and especially **White-winged Crossbills**.

Comment: A special note on the Spring and Fall pelagic trips run out of Montauk by John Askildsen. These premiere birding trips out into the deep waters off the continental shelf are run by John as a labor of love. He personally organizes and subsidizes them because of his love of pelagic birding. The fee is modest when compared to a full day of deep sea fishing, and everyone catches birds while the fishermen don't always catch fish. John is to be supported and encouraged.

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Abbreviations: CP - Central Park; CPHW - Central Pk Hawkwatch, 15 Aug to 15 Dec; CLP - Clove Lake Park, SI; FI - Fire Island; FIHW - Fire Island Hawkwatch, 10 Sep to 20 Nov; FBF-Floyd Bennett Field; FP - Forest Park; FT - Fort Tilden, Queens; GKP - Great Kills Park, SI; HLSP - Hempstead Lake State Park; JBWR - Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge; JBWE - Jones Beach West End; LI - Long Island; MEB - Mecox Bay; MP - Montauk Point; NYRBA - New York Rare Bird Alert; PL - Point Lookout side Jones Inlet; PP - Prospect Park; RMSP - Robert Moses State Park; RP - Riis Park, Queens; SHIN - Shinnecock Inlet; SI - Staten Island; ZB - Zachs Bay, Jones Beach.

LOONS-DUCKS

Red-necked Grebe: MP 8 Nov; RP 27 Nov; MP 29 Nov.
N. Fulmar: 4 17 mi S of MP 14 Sept (NYRBA).
Cory's Shearwater: FT Nov 8 (AO,EH).
Sooty Shearwater: FT Nov 8.
Least Bittern: JBWR 4 Oct (NYRBA).
Tricolored Heron: JBWR 26 Nov.
BLACK VULTURE: SI landfill 4 Sep; 3 (CPHW).
Turkey Vulture: 137 (CPHW); others.
Greater White-fronted Goose: Riverhead 28 Nov (AB).
Snow Goose: 1000⁺ JBWR 11 Oct; 4000⁺ RMSP 16 Nov; others widely scattered.
Tundra Swan: 3 Hook Pond 30 Oct to 9 Nov; 2 Hook Pond 28 Nov; 17 marsh between Gilgo and West Gilgo 14 Nov (DF); 4 over Neponsit 14 Nov; Makamah Nat. Pres., Fort Salonga, Suffolk Co 22 Nov; 1 RMSP 18 Nov.
Eurasian Wigeon: 3 at JBWR, one of which may be a Wigeon hybrid; others.
King Eider: MP 14 Sep; 8 PL 22 Nov thru.
Com. Eider: 200 MP 14 Sep, 1 Nov; 2500 29 Nov; PL 11 late Nov thru.
Harlequin Duck: 5 late Nov thru.
Com. Merganser: CLP mid Nov; returned to HLSP late Nov.

HAWKS-ALCIDS

Osprey: 459 (CPHW); 234 (FIHW).
Bald Eagle: 2 Gilgo 3 Sep; 18 (CPHW); 2 (FIHW).
N. Harrier: 33 (CPHW); 108 (FIHW).
Sharp-shinned Hawk: 1212 (CPHW); 383 (FIHW).
Cooper's Hawk: 109 (CPHW); 18 (FIHW).
N. Goshawk: 2 (CPHW); other widely scattered reports.
Red-shouldered Hawk: 30 (CPHW); somewhat more reports this Fall.
Broad-winged Hawk: 4646 (CPHW).
Red-tailed Hawk: 117 (CPHW); 1 (FIHW).
Golden Eagle: 125th St and Riverside Dr, Manhattan 28 Oct (TF); also vicinity of Riverside Church 8 Nov (JS); CP 17 Nov (MS).
Am. Kestrel: 215 (CPHW); 1224 (FIHW).
Merlin: 23 (CPHW); 805 (FIHW).

Peregrine Falcon: 15 (CPHW); 140 (FIHW).

Wild Turkey: 1 Van Cortland Pk 19 Nov
Am. Golden-Plover: extraordinary numbers on sod farms in early Sep with a max of 240 at Doctor's Path on 12 Sep; small flocks of up to 40 as late as 19 Oct.
Am. Oystercatcher: 100⁺ JBWR 12 Oct.
Am. Avocet: 2-3 JBWR from 17 Sep; 1 there 9-18 Oct.
Hudsonian Godwit: 1 JBWR 6 Sep; 4 JBWR 11 Sep; 2 JBWR 8-23 Nov; 1 JBWR 16 Nov; RMSP 8 Nov; 1 Sagg Pond 9-11 Nov; RMSP 9 Nov.
Marbled Godwit: 1 MEB 1 Sep; 6 JBWR 6 Sep; 8 JBWR 11 Sep; 2 JBWR to 23 Oct.
White-rumped Sandpiper: 7 Sagg Pond 9 Nov; 2 JBWE 16 Nov.
Baird's Sandpiper: mid to late Sep.
Pectoral Sandpiper: 3 MEB 9 Nov.
Purple Sandpiper: rocks Far Rockaway, Pt. Lookout early Nov thru.
Buff-breasted Sandpiper: SI 4 Sep; several at sod farms mid to late Sep.
Long-billed Dowitcher: to 2 Nov.
Wilson's Phalarope: JBWR 6 Sep.
Red-necked Phalarope: JBWR 11, 20 Sep.
Pomarine Jaeger: 4 seen 17 mi S of MP 14 Sept (JP).
Parasitic Jaeger: 4 MP 11 Oct; 6 MP 11 Oct, 19 Oct; 2 MP 25 Oct, 1 Nov (NYRBA); 1 Shagwong Pt. 1 Nov; 8 (3 dark morph, 5 light) Breezy Pt 15 Nov; 4-5 FT 22 Nov; others.
Laughing Gull: thru 23 Nov.
Black-headed Gull: MP 11 Oct.
MEW GULL: possible post 2nd summer PL 23 Nov thru, identification not yet verified, *intro*.
Iceland Gull: various late Oct thru.
Lesser Black-backed Gull: 11 Fresh Kills Landfill, SI 31 Oct; numerous reports throughout the season, the species is definitely increasing in our area.
Glaucous Gull: various 1 Nov thru.
Black-legged Kittiwake: MP 25 Oct (SB); RMSP 8 Nov (JQ); 15⁺ MP 8 Nov (MC); Far Rockaway 22 Nov (M&LL).
SABINE'S GULL: 1 ad 50 mi S of MP 6 Sept; 1 ad 17 mi S of MP 14 Sept, from fishing boat no details (JP).

Caspian Tern: 2 SI 9 Sep; on shore among the resting gulls ZB 25 Sep; 2 FI 5 Oct; last 8 Oct.

Royal Tern: 17 New Suffolk Harbor 1 Sep; 12 JBWR 21 Sep; 22 SHIN 4 Oct; 1 Democrat PT 25 Oct; 2 JBWE 2 Nov; 1 JBWE 16 Nov.

Com. Tern: 1 JBWE 25 Nov.

Forster's Tern: 28 JBWE 2 Nov.

Black Tern: 6 SI 9 Sep; others to 11 Sep.

Razorbill: 3 MP 29 Nov (HMc).

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS

Black-billed Cuckoo: ZB 30 Oct.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Breezy Pt 6 Nov; JBWE 15 Nov.

Barn Owl: FBF 16 Nov; JBWR 19 Nov.

Long-eared Owl: JBWE 13 Nov; 4 JBWE 25 Nov; CP mid Nov thru.

Short-eared Owl: Spring Creek 19 Nov; JBWR 22 Nov, same bird?

N. Saw-whet Owl: JBWE early Nov.

Red-headed Woodpecker: several on the beaches during migration including SI; two imm, one ad CP late Oct thru; total of 4 CP late in season.

Hairy Woodpecker: more than usual on the beaches where they are normally rare.

FLYCATCHERS-WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: JBWE 14 Sep.

Western Kingbird: 2 RMSP 13 Sep; Gilgo 2 Nov; RMSP 18 Nov; RP 22 Nov thru; along Meadowbrook Pkwy 29 Nov (PP).

N. Shrike: Dune Rd 28 Nov (SB).

White-eyed Vireo: PP 15 Nov thru.

Blue-headed Vireo: East Quogue Oct 17; PP 22 Nov.

Philadelphia Vireo: several to mid Sep.

Barn Swallow: thru 15 Nov.

Sedge Wren: RP 26 Sep (PB).

Marsh Wren: PP 23 Nov.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR: GKP 5-6 Sep (CH *fide* HF).

Gray-checked Thrush: CP 1, 4 Nov (TF,CB).

Wood Thrush: CP 19 Nov (DP).

Am. Pipit: mostly fly over migrants.

WARBLERS

Golden-winged Warbler: JBWE 19 Sep (JQ), extremely rare on the beach.

Tennessee Warbler: thru 11 Oct.

Orange-crowned Warbler: somewhat more this year CP to MP.

Nashville Warbler: feeder off East Lake 29 Nov (PL).

N. Parula: to 26 Oct.

Yellow Warbler: to 9 Nov.

Magnolia Warbler: to 11 Oct.

Cape May Warbler: to 12 Nov.

TOWNSEND'S WARBLER: female MP 30 Nov, *intro*.

Black-throated Green Warbler: to 29 Nov.

Blackburnian Warbler: to 11 Oct.

Pine Warbler: Gilgo 2 Nov; JBWE 14 Nov (DF).

Bay-breasted Warbler: to 7 Oct.

Blackpoll Warbler: to 23 Nov.

Cerulean Warbler: JBWE 7 Oct (SS).

Black-and-white Warbler: to 30 Oct.

Am. Redstart: to 11 Oct.

Ovenbird: CP Oct 18.

Kentucky Warbler: GKP 18 Sep.

Connecticut Warbler: mid Sep - 6 Oct.

Wilson's Warbler: CP Oct 18.

Yellow-breasted Chat: a scattering of reports SI to MP.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS

Summer Tanager: CP 27 Sep (TF); Gilgo 7 Oct (HR,LS).

Scarlet Tanager: to 11 Oct.

Clay-colored Sparrow: single birds late Sep - end Oct.

Vesper Sparrow: several migrants.

Lark Sparrow: several.

Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow: migrants mid Oct - mid-Nov.

Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow: migrants mid Oct - mid Nov.

Lincoln's Sparrow: widely scattered reports mid Oct - mid Nov.

Lapland Longspur: single birds JBWR, Smith Pt Pk, Ferry Pt Pk (Bronx) late Sept - early Nov.

Snow Bunting: 150⁺ JBWE late Nov thru; others.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak: to 12 Oct.

Blue Grosbeak: single birds and pairs mid-Sep - mid Oct.

Dickcissel: SI to MP early Sep - early Oct; E. Hampton 23 Nov.

Yellow-headed Blackbird: imm male CP 23 Oct - 18 Nov (MOB).

Rusty Blackbird: more migrants this year.

Boat-tailed Grackle: 150⁺ Howard Beach (by JBWR) 9 Nov, the colony is holding its own; others in the Hamptons.

Baltimore Oriole: last report female Riverdale Pk 19 Nov.

Purple Finch: scattered small groups mid Nov thru.

House Finch: numbers reduced, probably due to disease.

Red Crossbill: scattered small groups mid Nov thru.

White-winged Crossbill: flights along beaches throughout the Region early Nov thru, the largest numbers in many years.

Com. Redpoll: sporadic birds along beaches Nov thru.

Pine Siskin: sporadic birds and groups Oct thru, tapering off into late Nov; hundreds 18 Nov.

Am. Goldfinch: huge flights Oct with fewer later in season.

Evening Grosbeak: 1 JBWE 27 Sep; 1 JBWE 26 Oct; 2 CLP 30 Oct; 1 CP 29 Oct, 12 Nov; 1 RP 16 Nov; FI 18 Nov.

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