

REGION 1 - NIAGARA FRONTIER

Dick Miga

38 Elm St, Fredonia NY 14063-1937

The spring report for the Niagara Frontier would not be complete without a passing farewell to one of the most unusual winters on record. The winter of 1997-98 was a rather remarkable one for western and central New York. If one were to look at the snowfall totals, it would appear the winter was close to normal. However, that does not tell the whole story.

The very strong El Niño pattern energized the subtropical jet stream and kept an active storm track from the Gulf states up into the northeast. This resulted in an unusually high frequency of synoptic storms for our Region, with many of them being in the form of rain. The typical lake effect machine virtually shut down after mid December. Buffalo had its mildest winter in 66 years.

March began with a continuation of the mild pattern for the first two weeks, but winter made an encore the latter two weeks. Two significant snowfalls occurred, the first, an Alberta Clipper on the 14th, dropped 6-10" across much of the Region, and the second, a synoptic storm on the 21st-22nd, dropped up to a foot from Buffalo to Rochester. This storm also dropped unusually heavy amounts from Niagara County west across the Niagara Peninsula. Some lake effect dropped several inches on Chautauqua County during this period as well. By the end of the month the snow had melted and record temperatures reached the area. Highs of 76°, 77° and 78° were recorded in Buffalo on the 30th, 28th, and 31st. Also, a record 84° was recorded at Dunkirk on the 28th. Vivian Pitzrick reported unusually early large insect activity and swarms from the Allegany county area on the 31st.

April was an unusually pleasant month. Temperatures averaged just above normal, and rainfall was a bit below normal. "This was the first April without snow at Buffalo in 17 years," to quote Steve McLaughlin, Chief Meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Buffalo. The average temperature for the month was 46.8°F, 0.6 degrees above normal. Precipitation was 2.54 inches, 0.33 inches below normal. Sunshine was present 57% of the month's possible daylight hours.

May was similar to its two predecessor months, being the third warmest May in Buffalo history. The month's main feature was a long spell of warm, dry, and sunny days from the 12th to the 30th. The average temperature was 62.8°, more than 6 degrees above normal. While 27 days recorded higher than usual temperatures, no records were set. Sunshine was logged 58% of the daylight hours. The 31st, however, produced one of the most violent storms in recent years. The day was marked with lightning, tremendous squalls accompanied by hail, and a confirmed tornado in the village of Brocton in Chautauqua County. To conclude this weather section, the Lake Erie temperature of 70° on May 31st,

was the third warmest for that date in the history of local meteorological record keeping.

One effect of the abnormal weather conditions was unusual avian activity in the Region during the period. This was accompanied by earlier than usual foliage which presented a challenge to visual identification of the passerines for many of the contributors. Many of the local ornithologists and local bird experts offered possible explanations for the unusual sightings reported during this period, ranging from the possible loss of avian life during the severe storms of 1997 to possible gradual diurnal and nocturnal flyovers that prevented any of the really good, typical fallouts which commonly occur during this time of year. In any event, as the period continued the arrivals eventually occurred.

The bird of the period and possibly for the year is the **Lazuli Bunting**, (*Passerina amoena*). The bird first appeared at a feeder near the home of Don and Virginia Tiede on Silver Road in the Town of Bethany in Genesee County on 16 March, disappeared the next day and returned on the 21st after a heavy snowfall. The homeowners contacted Gail Seamans, who upon a careful scrutiny properly identified the bird as an immature male of that species. The report immediately brought hundreds of visitors to the Tiede farm, including this reporter who was lucky to see the bird. A conversation with the owner indicated that this western species (which normally winters in Mexico) appeared to have arrived with a flock of Am. Tree Sparrows. It was last observed by David and Debbie Suggs on 4 April, although RBA reports have it around until 13 April. This is a first sighting for the Niagara Frontier and for New York State.

Other notable records for the period included: the sighting of an American White Pelican, reports of Sandhill Cranes, a new location for Lesser Black-backed Gull, a first nesting record for Peregrine Falcon, and appearances of uncommon visitors such as: **Eared Grebe**, Northern Goshawk, **Summer Tanager**, "Lawrence's" Warbler, **Yellow-throated Warbler**, Clay-colored Sparrow, and **Yellow-headed Blackbird**.

The American White Pelican appeared at the Oak Orchard Game Management Area in Orleans County on 28 March. The bird was discovered flying over Ring-Neck Marsh. A pelican (presumably the same one) was observed in the Region through 20 April. Sandhill Cranes were identified in the Town of Somerset in Niagara County on 18 April, and again at the Oak Orchard area on the 24th and 25th. These birds are becoming more frequently sighted at the local hawk-watches (Hamburg and Ripley) as the number of observers continues to increase. A Lesser-Black-backed Gull was sighted with Ring-billed Gulls on Lake Ontario at Krull Park in the village of Olcott In Niagara County. This is a new location for the sighting of this species. On April 18th a local resident of Niagara Falls, Ontario sighted a Peregrine Falcon pair nesting in a scrape (containing four eggs) on a ledge in the Niagara Gorge approximately 300 yards north of the Canadian Falls. This nesting is considered to be a first record for that species in this locality.

Sightings of the following birds were also considered significant to the Region: an **Eared Grebe** on an artificial lake on the grounds of the State University of New York at Buffalo (Amherst Campus) on 13 May; a **Northern Goshawk** observed on 25 May in the Town of Wethersfield, Wyoming County, with another bird spotted in the same area a few days later giving birders Dick and Dorothy Rosche cause to speculate that there might be a possible nesting in the area; a first year **Summer Tanager** observed in the company of two Scarlet Tanagers at Point Gratiot (a recently declared IBA) near Dunkirk NY on 26 May; and three reports of the recessive "Lawrence's" Warbler on 16, 17, & 26 May from Cattaraugus and Wyoming counties. These latter birds were reported to be giving the two note call of the Blue-winged Warbler. A male **Yellow-throated Warbler** was found on 18 April at the Tifft Nature Preserve in Buffalo, and a Clay-colored Sparrow was spotted at the same area on 26 April. Finally, on 2 May a **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was moving with a flock of Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds at a feeding station on the grounds of the Beaver Meadow Nature Center in the Town of Java in Wyoming County.

The Buffalo Ornithological Society (BOS) conducts two Spring Bird Counts, one in April and one in May. The April count was held earlier than normal this year on the 5th. The weather on the count day was cool and rainless with light to moderate winds from the North to Northwest. Skies were generally clear. A comparison of the past twenty years of data identified the following significant recordings: new low counts for that period were noted for Blue-winged Teal, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, American Robin, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, (most icterids were down), and House Sparrow. New highs were recorded for: White-winged Scoter, Ruddy Duck, Barred Owl, Long-Eared Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and White-winged Crossbill (4). A new observation for the period was a single Solitary Sandpiper. Compilers for this report were Ed Fuchs, Mike Hamilton, and Terry Yonker.

Jim Landau, compiler for the BOS May Bird Count (on the 17th), reports, that despite all the ominous talk regarding poor flights, the numbers weren't actually too far off. The expected drop in warblers did not materialize. In fact, after analyzing the total list, the only noteworthy low figures were for Spotted and Semipalmated sandpipers, Nashville Warbler, and House Finch. Relative to groups, finches in general were notably low. The only significant highs were for Turkey Vulture, Short-billed Dowitcher, Herring Gull, and Common Yellowthroat. Even these highs and lows were not dramatic.

Following is the spring report from the Ripley Hawkwatch. This site is located along the southern shore of Lake Erie approximately 60 miles west of Buffalo and 20 miles east of Erie, PA. It is located on a lake plain with a glacial terminal moraine approximately 2 miles from the lake edge. This geologic formation provides an excellent viewing area for the many passing raptors and vultures. Coordinator for the watch is Leonard Defrancisco from Falconer, NY.

<u>Species</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Peak Flight Day</u>	<u>Range of Dates</u>
Turkey Vulture	**6,737	1270 on 26 Mar	2 Mar to 28 May
Osprey	247	34 on 5 May	26 Mar to 27 May
Bald Eagle	31	5 on 1 May	17 Mar to 28 May
Northern Harrier	196	33 on 1 May	11 Feb to 23 May
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2,113	268 on 1 May	7 Mar to 28 May
Cooper's Hawk	57	8 on 26 Mar	23 Mar to 20 May
Northern Goshawk	3	1 on several days	25 Mar to 15 Apr
Red-shouldered Hawk	248	125 on 25 Mar	7 Mar to 17 Apr
Broad-winged Hawk	10,969	*6,174 on 1 May	11 Apr to 28 May
Swainson's Hawk	1	1 on 1 May	1 May
Red-tailed Hawk	1,440	239 on 3 Feb	10 Feb to 28 May
Rough-legged Hawk	14	2 on several days	10 Feb to 21 Apr
Golden Eagle	7	*3 on 25 Mar	25 Mar to 21 May
American Kestrel	** 409	47 on 1 May	27 Feb to 28 May
Merlin	18	2 on several days	16 Mar to 17 May
Peregrine Falcon	** 23	*4 on 25 Mar, 12 May	25 Mar to 15 May
Unidentified Raptors	89	-	-

** = Record total for a year

* = Record one day high total

Contributors: Robert Andrie, Alan Baczkiewicz, Frank Baczkiewicz, Elizabeth Brooks, Bruce Chilton, Willie D'Anna, Mike Davis, Henry Forbes, Kurt Fox, Ike Gillette, Nancy Gillette, Barbara Henderson, Paul Hess, Audrey Horbett, Morgan Jones, Dave Junkin, Aron Kehlenbeck, Brenda Klick, Jim Landau, Louis Lisi, Mike Morgante, Tom O'Donnell, Susan O'Donnell, Vivian Pitzrick, Betsy Potter, Ed Ratajczak, Frances Rew, Gerald Rising, Donald Roberson (DonR), Richard Rosche, Dorothy Rosche, Olga Rosche, Gail Seamans, Jack Skalicky, David Suggs (Buffalo RBA), Debra Suggs, Joe Thill (weather data, too), John Thill, Michael Turisk, Anne Vogt, William Watson, Jim Wojewodzki, Peter Yoerg.

Abbreviations: AL - Amity Lake - ALLE; BWWTWP - Batavia Waste Water Treatment Plant GENE; BuSP - Buckhorn Island State Park - Grand Island; BRBA - Buffalo Rare Bird Alert; FMSCP - Four Mile Creek State Park - NIAG; FNSP - Fort Niagara State Park - NIAG; GHFS - Golden Hills State Forest - NIAG; GI - Goat Island - Niagara Falls; HH - Hamburg Hawkwatch - Hamburg NY ERIE; INWR - Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge - GENE/ORLE; NF - Niagara Falls; NR - Niagara River; OOWMA - Oak Orchard Wildlife Management Area - GENE; Tift NP - Tift Nature Preserve, Buffalo; TWMA - Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area - WYOM; WTSP - Wilson Tuscarora State Park - NIAG; WB - Woodlawn Beach - ERIE.

LOONS - DUCKS

Red-Throated Loon: 1 T Somerset NIAG 18 Apr.

Pied-billed Grebe: 1 OOWMA 23 Mar (PY).

Horned Grebe: max 1209 BWWTP 15,29 Mar (GS,AV); various other sightings thru Mar.

Red-Necked Grebe: 1 GHSF 7 Mar (WD); max 74 T Shadigee ORLE 11 Apr (WD); last 7 Niagara Falls 7 May (MM et al).

Eared Grebe: 1 Lake LaSalle University of Buffalo Campus 13 May (TO!).

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN: 1 INWR 28 Mar - 20 Apr (JL,mob).

Double-crested Cormorant: 116 & 30 nests Reef Lighthouse ERIE 24 May (WW); max 209 BuSP 26 May (WW).

Am. Bittern: 1 TWMA & Tift NP 11 Apr.

Great Egret: 1 INWR 8 Apr; 7 (4 nests) Motor Island NR 26 Apr (WW).

Green Heron: arr 1 Tift NP 23 Mar (WW), early.

Black-Crowned Night-Heron: 7,8 Motor Island NR 7,29 Mar (T&SO,WW).

Turkey Vulture: max 696 HH 28 Mar (FR, et al).

Snow Goose: 1-63 various sites thru Mar.

Tundra Swan: 1-400 various sites thru Apr; last 3 TWMA 22 May (MM,WW).

Eurasian Wigeon: 1 OOWMA 12 Apr (PY!).

Blue-winged Teal: arr 3 BWWTP 29 Mar.

N. Shoveler: 3 BWWTP 1 Mar (GS!).

Canvasback: last 1 Niagara Falls 16 Mar.

Lesser Scaup: 100 BWWTP 29 Mar.

Surf Scoter: arr 2 T Somerset NIAG 18 Apr.

Ruddy Duck: 3,42 BWWTP 1,8 Mar (GS!); max 353 BWWTP 22 Apr (WW!).

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Osprey: arr 1 AL 16 Mar (IG,NG); 1 HH 25 Mar (FR!).

Bald Eagle: max 2 INWR on nest 6 Mar - 10 May.

N. Goshawk: arr 1 T Hamburg ERIE 25 Apr; 2 T Wethersfield WYOM 25,27 May (R&DR!).

Broad-winged Hawk: arr 1 T Hamburg ERIE 11 Apr (FR).

Rough-Legged Hawk: last 1 T Lancaster ERIE 4 May.

Golden Eagle: arr 1 T Hamburg ERIE 18 Apr (JnT!).

Merlin: arr 1 T Yates ORLE 28 Mar (WD!, et al).

Peregrine Falcon: 1 T Hamburg ERIE 12 Apr (BA!); 2 NR nesting in a scrape in gorge 18 Apr (LL).

Sora: arr 2 TWMA 11 Apr.

Com. Moorhen: arr 1 OOWMA 14 Apr.

SANDHILL CRANE: 1 T Somerset NIAG 18 Apr (WD!, et al); 1 OOWMA & INWR 24,25 Apr (BC,MM).

Black-bellied Plover: arr 1 INWR 3 May.

Am. Golden-Plover: 1 INWR 3 May (WD!PY!BH!), rare in spring.

Semipalmated Plover: arr 3 INWR 6 May.

Greater Yellowlegs: arr 1 BWWTP 3 Apr; max 45 T Hartland NIAG 18 Apr.

Lesser Yellowlegs: arr 2 T Somerset NIAG.

Solitary Sandpiper: arr 1 Williamsville Glen ERIE 5 May.

Spotted Sandpiper: arr 1 BWWTP 22 Apr.

Upland Sandpiper: arr 1 T Hartland NIAG 9 May.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: arr 3 INWR 15 May.

Least Sandpiper: arr 1 T Porter 25 Apr.

White-rumped Sandpiper: arr 1 INWR 15 May.

Pectoral Sandpiper: arr 12 GHSF 28 Mar.

Purple Sandpiper: several 5-6 observed thru period (mob); last 1 GI 12 May (BP!).

Dunlin: arr 1 GI 15 Mar (WD!BP!), very early.

Short-billed Dowitcher: arr 3 IWNWR 15 May.

Com. Snipe: arr 1 T Somerset NIAG 28 Mar.

Am. Woodcock: arr T Lancaster ERIE 6 Mar (MM).

Little Gull: 1-6 various sightings from NR & Lake Ontario Plain thru Mar (mob); 1 T Somerset NIAG 18 Apr.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 4250 NR 31 Mar (GB).

Iceland Gull: max 10 NR 22 Mar (MM,WD mob).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: 2 GI 15 Mar (WD!,BP!); last 1 V Olcott NIAG 22 Apr (BC!).

Glaucous Gull: 1 V Olcott T Newfane NIAG 17 Mar.

Caspian Tern: arr 1 INWR 8 Apr (KF).

Com. Tern: arr 6 Fort Erie ONTARIO 11 Apr.
Black Tern: arr 1 TWMA 3 May.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Black-billed Cuckoo: arr 1 T Colden ERIE 12 May.
Yellow-billed Cuckoo: arr 1 TWMA 16 May.
Snowy Owl: 1 T Sheldon WYOM 17,22 Mar.
Long-eared Owl: 4,1 FMSCP, Evangola SP 17,29 Mar.
Short-eared Owl: max 12 T Yates ORLE 15 Mar; 1 T Sheldon WYOM 22 Mar.
N. Saw-whet Owl: 1-4 WTSP various dates thru Mar; 1 Tift NP 28 Mar.
Com. Nighthawk: arr 1 T Tonawanda ERIE 14 May.
Whip-poor-will: arr 2 V Blasdel ERIE 6 May.
Chimney Swift: arr 1 Niagara Falls 17 Apr (DonR)
Ruby-throated Hummingbird: arr 1 T Colden ERIE 7 May.
Red-headed Woodpecker: arr 1 FNSP 8 May.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

E. Wood-Pewee: arr 1 Tift NP 12 May.
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: arr 1 Evangola SP ERIE 21 May.
Acadian Flycatcher: arr 1 INWR 22 May.
Alder Flycatcher: arr 1 T Alfred ALLE 24 May.
Willow Flycatcher: arr 1 WB 15 May.
Least Flycatcher: arr 1 BuSP 5 May.
E. Phoebe: arr 1 T Wheatfield NIAG 25 Mar; max 5 T Hamburg ERIE.
Great Crested Flycatcher: arr 1 T Alfred ALLE 3 May.
E. Kingbird: arr 1 T Hamburg ERIE 1 May (FR).
White-eyed Vireo: arr 1 TWMA 25 Apr thru (MM!).
Blue-headed Vireo: arr 2 Chestnut Ridge Park ERIE 25 Apr; 1 T Ward ALLE 25 Apr.
Yellow-throated Vireo: arr 1 TWMA 5 May.
Warbling Vireo: arr 2 OOWMA 3 May.
Philadelphia Vireo: arr 1 Tift NP 12 May.
Red-eyed Vireo: arr 1 BuSP 5 May.

Com. Raven: 1 T Alfred ALLE 13,16 Mar (EB); 2 T Ward ALLE 26 Mar (EB); 1 AL 31 Mar (VP).

Purple Martin: arr 1 INWR 14 Apr.
Tree Swallow: arr 10 Tift NP 27 Mar.
N. Rough-winged Swallow: arr 2 Tift NP 11 Apr (JS).
Barn Swallow: arr 2 Tift NP 11 Apr.
Cliff Swallow: arr 3 BWWT 9 May, late.
House Wren: arr 1 WTSP 29 Apr.
Winter Wren: 4 T Hamburg ERIE 27 Mar.
Marsh Wren: arr 2 TWMA 11, 25 Apr (WD!,MM!).
Golden-crowned Kinglet: 15 T Hamburg ERIE & Tift NP 27 Mar.
Ruby-crowned Kinglet: arr 1 WTSP 17,24 Mar (BC!), very early.
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: arr 2 OOWMA 14 Apr (BC!), early.
E. Bluebird: 11 pairs nesting T of Amity ALLE as of 31 May (VP), decrease from prior years.
Veery: arr 1 T Wheatfield NIAG 7 May.
Gray-cheeked Thrush: arr 1 GI 17 May.
Swainson's Thrush: arr 2 T Tonawanda 5 May.
Hermit Thrush: arr 1 Buffalo 28 Mar.
Wood Thrush: arr 1 Eden Valley ERIE 1 May.
Brown Thrasher: arr 1 Tillman WMA ERIE 11 Apr (MM).
Am. Pipit: arr 1 T Lancaster ERIE 27 Mar; max 75 T Somerset NIAG 28 Mar; last 1 T Alabama 24 May (AK).

WARBLERS

Blue-winged Warbler: arr 1 Beaver Meadow WYOM 3 May (PY).
Golden-winged Warbler: arr 1 Tillman WMA ERIE 10 May.
"Brewster's" Warbler: 1 INWR 9 May.
"LAWRENCE'S" WARBLER: 1 Carlton Hill Multiple Use Area WYOM 16 May (AB, FB); 1 T Famersville CATT 26 May (BC).
Tennessee Warbler: arr 1 Eden Valley ERIE 10 May.
Nashville Warbler: arr 3 Tift NP 30 Apr.
N. Parula: arr 4 Buffalo 10 May.
Yellow Warbler: arr 2 Tift NP 2 May.
Chestnut-sided Warbler: arr 1 Tift NP 7 May.
Magnolia Warbler: arr 1 GI 10 May.
Cape May Warbler: arr 1 TWMA 13 May.

Black-throated Blue Warbler: arr 1 T Lancaster 6 May, late arrival.
Black-throated Green Warbler: arr 1 TWMA 29 Apr.
Blackburnian Warbler: arr 1 INWR 6 May.
YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER: 1 Tift NP 18 Apr (ER!).
Pine Warbler: arr 2 V Olcott NIAG 22 Apr.
Prairie Warbler: arr 1 T Colden ERIE 21 May.
Palm Warbler: arr 2 BuSP 26 Apr.
Bay-breasted Warbler: arr 6 WTSP 14 May.
Blackpoll Warbler: arr 2 T Lancaster ERIE 14 May.
Cerulean Warbler: arr 1 INWR 6 May.
Black-and-white Warbler: arr 1 WTSP 29 Apr.
Am. Redstart: arr 1 Tift NP 7 May.
Prothonotary Warbler: arr 1 INWR 22 May.
Ovenbird: arr 1 Point Gratiot CHAU 1 May.
N. Waterthrush: arr 1 Tift NP 30 Apr.
Louisiana Waterthrush: arr 1 Tift NP 18 Apr; max 6 Chestnut Ridge Park ERIE 25 Apr.
Connecticut Warbler: 1 Tift NP 28 May (MD!).
Mourning Warbler: arr 1 Lancaster 14 May.
Hooded Warbler: arr Point Gratiot CHAU 1 May.
Wilson's Warbler: arr 2 T Wilson 14 May.
Canada Warbler: arr 1 GHSF 15 May.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

SUMMER TANAGER: 1 Point Gratiot CHAU 26 May (WW!).
Scarlet Tanager: arr 2 Chestnut Ridge ERIE 6 May.
Chipping Sparrow: arr 1 IWNR 1 Apr.

Clay-colored Sparrow: Tift NP 29 Apr (WW!).
Field Sparrow: arr 1 GHSP 28 Mar.
Grasshopper Sparrow: arr 2 Carlton Hill Multiple Use Area WYOM 9 May.
Henslow's Sparrow: arr 3 Carlton Hill Multiple Use Area WYOM 9 May.
Fox Sparrow: 2 T Porter NIAG 7 Mar (SO).
Lincoln's Sparrow: arr 1 Tift NP 2 May.
Rose-breasted Grosbeak: arr 4 T Wales ERIE 1 May.
LAZULI BUNTING: 1 T Bethany GENE 22 Mar thru 4 Apr (GS!mob), reports continued thru 13th Apr BRBA.
Indigo Bunting: arr 1 Eden Valley ERIE 6 May.
Bobolink: arr 2 T Wales ERIE 3 May.
E. Meadowlark: 1 T Java WYOM 15 Mar (KF).
YELLOW-HEADED BLACKBIRD: 1 Beaver Meadow NC WYOM 2 May (DJ!).
Rusty Blackbird: 5 T Pike 17 Mar; last 1 Tift NP 23 May (WW!).
Orchard Oriole: arr 1 Delaware Park C Buffalo 13 May.
Baltimore Oriole: arr 1 T Colden ERIE 5 May.
Red Crossbill: 11 T Colden ERIE 23-30 Apr (JW); max 25 Bush Hill State Forest CATT 30 Apr (BC).
White-winged Crossbill: 2,1 T Ward ALLE 28,29 Mar (EB); 2 T Ward 25 Apr (EB); last 6 T West Almond ALLE 24 May (EB).
Com. Redpoll: max 45 V Olcott NIAG 17 Mar; last 1 Beaver Meadow NC 3 May.
Pine Siskin: max 9 T Colden ERIE 1 - 30 Apr.
Evening Grosbeak: max 60 T Colden 1 thru 30 Apr.

remelm2463@aol.com

