

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SUMMER SEASON 1998

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Weather Effects

It was another summer with few hot days, some Regions again failing to reach the 90 degree mark. For most of the state, the three month temperature average was near normal and, in several Regions, June was the first month of the year that was below normal. As usual, summer precipitation was erratic in its coverage and intensity. Regions 2 and 7 received more than their share of storms with Region 7 getting particularly drenched. As a result of storms, Regions 5 and 7 reported failed Common Loon nestings. In Region 1 thunderstorms were suggested as a possible reason for the local scarcity of the ground and bank nesting species, such as Spotted Sandpiper, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Typical of the spotty nature of summer rains, most of the Regions were moderately dry in July and August, improving the odds of nesting success where such was the case.

Late Spring Migrants

A few shorebirds lingered into June, but not many passerines were noted. Region 2 was the exception to the latter with several species noted in the closely monitored Braddock Bay area. In Region 10 a long list of warblers was reported as late migrants, though it is uncertain that these birds were not breeding in the area. A fine tally of shorebirds and waterfowl for the date of 9 June was made in Region 6. Occurring on an island, the group included some species frequently missed in spring elsewhere in that Region. Among the latest of the migrant waterfowl, a count of 85 Brant in Region 6 and a "flock" in Region 9 were notable. Other sightings that caught my eye included a 6 June Ruby-crowned Kinglet and 19 Yellow-bellied Flycatchers banded on 11 June in Region 2. The latter sighting exceeds all maxima in the new *Bull's Birds of New York State* (Rising 1998). Other late sightings were a Dunlin on 14 June in Region 5; a Tennessee Warbler on 10 June in Region 8; and a Philadelphia Vireo on 9 June in Region 9. Lastly, according to *Bull's Birds of New York State* (Sherony & Brooks 1998), a Wilson's Warbler on 17 June in Region 8 would be a state record late date for sightings away from possible breeding sites.

Breeding Birds

Waterbird studies were conducted in Regions 6, 7, and 10 with devastation caused by humans noted in two of the Regions. One well publicized incident was the slaughter of Double-crested Cormorants at their huge colony on Little Galloo Island, an Important Bird Area (IBA) in Region 6. Over 1000 adults and young were either killed by shotgun or starved without parents to feed them. It has been widely speculated that the perpetrators were disgruntled fishermen who

believed the cormorants were eating them out of their livelihood, literally. Though the cause and effect of simple "human intrusion" may be less blatantly detrimental, it can still be devastating, as illustrated at a heron rookery in Region 10.

Grassland birds were a major focus of study again this year. The Nations Road IBA in Region 2 was very productive for several species while the Perch River WMA in Region 6 appears to be the heart of Henslow's Sparrow country. A remarkable 122 singing males were recorded during a nighttime survey at the latter site. We should not allow ourselves to get too comfortable, however, as the species is nearly extirpated from the province of Ontario, a mere 15 miles from Perch River. In 1996 only two breeding sites were found in the province (Anon 1996).

Shorebirds

The northbound shorebird migration is often recorded into June, as was the case this year. Though the total numbers of individuals and species do not rival those of later in the summer, there were some interesting observations. Sizeable flocks were noted for the following species: Ruddy Turnstone in Regions 2 and 6; Sanderling in Region 2; and Semipalmated Sandpiper in Regions 2, 3, 5, and 6. Dunlin are very difficult to find after May. Yet, this year they were recorded in five Regions with the last dates in those Regions ranging from 7-14 June!

When the summer doldrums hit, there is nothing finer than a shorebird "hotspot" for adding a little variety and allowing birders to sharpen their identification skills. To the inland birders, myself included, Region 10 is always a hotspot and many of our "good days" are rather routine by coastal standards. So, it was nice to see Regions 3 and 5 with some excellent shorebirding this summer and Regions 1 and 8 with fair lists as well. In Region 3 the Montezuma NWR was again nicely managed for shorebirds, with water levels raised or lowered as appropriate. In Region 5, Delta Lake is lowered annually, though presumably not particularly managed to attract waders. Thus, it may be less consistent than Montezuma, but this year at least it was very good, and the shorebirds attracted up to four Merlins. I noted no obvious patterns in the records of these southbound migrants.

Miscellaneous

The tiny Great Egret colony in Region 1 did very well this year. High counts of this species in Regions 3, 5, and 8 would seem to imply a bright future in this state. As mentioned previously, however, the loss of a Region 10 rookery this year tempers one's enthusiasm.

Summering waterfowl add variety to the season. More sightings of some species may be a result of population increases. That would seem to be the case with Snow Goose, found in four Regions. A count of 95 shovelers in Region 1 on 22 August would seem to be a very high count for so early in the fall migration. Other uncommon waterfowl included Ring-necked Duck and Greater

Scaup in three Regions, Lesser Scaup and Oldsquaw in two, Common Goldeneye in Region 9, and White-winged Scoter and Bufflehead in Region 2.

Rarities

With good shorebird habitat in several Regions, it is not surprising that family comprises a large proportion of the birds that follow. Region 1 highlights included Sandhill Crane, Piping Plover, Marbled Godwit, Western Sandpiper, a very rare spring migrant Western Kingbird, and midsummer Worm-eating and Kentucky warblers. Region 2 had a holdover Tricolored Heron from spring, a midsummer Merlin, Marbled Godwit, and a pair of American Avocets. A Curlew Sandpiper was only the third state record away from the coast, yet was the second for Region 3, which also had two American Avocets, a rare and unseasonal Little Gull, Rusty Blackbird, Whip-poor-will, and a Loggerhead Shrike, probably a southbound migrant by the date. Region 5's shorebird bonanza included Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Wilson's and Red-necked phalaropes. Prothonotary and Kentucky warblers were also found in Region 5, though neither was believed to have nested.

In Region 6 a very rare possibly breeding Bay-breasted Warbler was a highlight while a Fish Crow in Region 7 was north of the known breeding range of that species in the state. Region 8 added a very rare Long-billed Dowitcher and a Kentucky Warbler, while Clay-colored Sparrow and Yellow-breasted Chat highlighted Region 9's list. In Region 10 a difficult-to-identify and unseasonal Thayer's Gull was documented and hopefully, this will be forwarded to NYSARC. How about a Common Raven on Staten Island – who needs the northern forest when you have garbage dumps! Region 10 also provided the second spring migrant Western Kingbird of the season.

Finally, the hands down winner of the BOTS award goes to the Broad-billed Sandpiper at Jamaica Bay NWR in Region 10, a first record not only for New York but for the lower 48 states as well. This bird was extremely cooperative once it found its niche, allowing hundreds to view it in its nine-day stay. For the full story, see William Benner's account of this record in the September 1998 issue of *The Kingbird*.

LITERATURE CITED

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