

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FALL SEASON 1998

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WEATHER EFFECTS

Tropical Storms Floyd and Dennis alleviated the summer drought in much of the state. Eastern areas of New York got drenched by Floyd which dropped as much as 14 inches of rain in Region 9. In addition to widespread flooding, the storm caused mudslides and a dam to fail in Region 7. The earlier Dennis had less impact but it did help to control the forest fires raging in the Adirondacks. These storms produced some interesting birds but only in coastal areas of Region 10. Overall, it was another warmer than average season with September and especially November well above normal. Migrant songbird concentrations were few with only Region 10 noting one day, 11 Sep, as significant.

WATERFOWL

Despite the fact that this group was considered down in Regions 3 & 5 this season, there were several highlights. Brant were found in numbers over 1000 in the Lake Ontario Regions 1, 2, & 5 with an impressive 10,000 in three days at the Hamlin Beach Lakewatch in Region 2. Green-winged Teals had counts of at least 90 in six Regions and a maximum of 309 in Region 2 and Ring-necked Ducks numbered at least 175 in six Regions with a maximum of 550 in Region 1. Those looking in *Bull's Birds of New York State*(1998) will find that these numbers pale in comparison to maxima recorded at Montezuma NWR in Region 3. However, Montezuma is an extraordinary place and compared to other locations in the state, the counts above are quite high. Good numbers of Ruddy Ducks were also found in seven Regions with a maximum of 780 in Region 1 and one was early in Region 7. This species has shown a definite upward trend in recent years. Some other fine counts this season included 1163 Wood Ducks in Region 9, 300 Northern Shovelers and 7600 Greater Scaups in Region 1, 1350 Common Goldeneyes in Region 7, and 639 and 450 Buffleheads in Regions 2 & 7, respectively. Though Snow Geese seemed down in some Regions as compared to the previous fall, 12-14,000 in

Region 7 is a very high count. A flock of 32 Canada Geese would not be worth mentioning, except for one thing – these were the small *hutchinsii* subspecies, carefully documented in Region 1, and a state record count by far! Region 7 reported at least two more of this small form.

OTHER WATERBIRDS

Red-necked Grebe, an uncommon to rare species in much of the state, was considered up in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6, & 7. Jaegers had a fine season on Lake Ontario with 170 individuals in Region 2, 24 in Region 5, and other sightings in Regions 1 & 6. Some gull highlights included Franklin's in Regions 2, 3, 9, & 10, Sabine's in Regions 1 & 5, a Black-headed in Region 2, and a Laughing in Region 3. The Niagara River in Region 1 had an off year but still produced 2-3 California Gulls, an annual visitor there since 1992. Although no scintillating shorebirds were found, several rare and uncommon species showed up in multiple Regions. Hudsonian Godwits were in four Regions, Marbled Godwits in two, Western Sandpipers in five, Purple Sandpipers in four, Buff-breasted Sandpipers in three, Long-billed Dowitchers in four, Red-necked Phalaropes in six, and Red Phalaropes in four.

NORTHERN INVADERS

It was nearly unanimous among the Regional Editors – Northern Shrikes staged a very strong movement. It will be interesting to see if CBC totals for this year rival the record shattering 1995-96 irruption. Bohemian Waxwings came early and were relatively widespread. They were found in Regions 1, 2, 7, 8, & way down south in Region 10, where they are listed as casual in *Bull's Birds of New York State* (1998). Red-breasted Nuthatches were widespread and numerous and they also came early. And, like two years ago, they presaged an invasion of what birders really long for – winter finches. Although numbers were generally modest and some species were already in decline by season's end, any finch invasion nowadays makes birders happy. In Region 10, they must have been ecstatic as numbers of both crossbills, Pine Siskins, and American Goldfinches were very impressive there. Resident Black-capped Chickadee numbers are sometimes augmented by migrants from more northerly regions, as was the case this year. Regions 2, 3, 4, 8, and 9 noticed the movement. A Boreal Chickadee tagged along in Region 9.

MISCELLANEOUS

Although both Braddock Bay in Region 2 and Derby Hill in Region 5 are stellar spring hawkwatching sites, only Braddock Bay has an annual "wrong-way" migration of raptors, which occurs predominantly in August. This season, Derby Hill got into the act with impressive *October* flights. Among the highlights were one-day counts of 224 Red-tailed Hawks, five Bald Eagles, two Golden Eagles, and seven immature Northern Goshawks. Any one of those counts would make for a very respectable spring day. Northern Goshawks were not only in Region 5 but were found in all ten Regions! Among the regular autumn hawk-watches, Region 8 included the totals from Camp Pinnacle, Region 4 gave some highlights from Franklin Mountain, and Region 10 listed highlights from Central Park and Fire Island. 61 Peregrine Falcons at Fire Island set a record one-day total and 260 there established a new season high. Obviously, these are statewide records as well.

Results from banding stations make one think. In Region 2 over 200 Gray-cheeked Thrushes were banded as were three Connecticut Warblers and one Yellow-breasted Chat. Region 3 banders also got a Connecticut Warbler and both Regions 3 & 8 netted Bicknell's Thrush, a NYSARC review species. All of these birds are rather secretive and they illustrate how banding data may give a truer picture of their status in New York. Of course, it is not just the skulkers that get caught in the nets. The same banding stations documented the already mentioned Black-capped Chickadee invasion.

RARITIES

As usual for the fall, so many rarities were reported that only the very best will be mentioned here. In Region 1 there was a Western Grebe, Loggerhead Shrike, and a Wyoming County first Brewer's Blackbird. Region 2 added Tricolored Heron, Cattle Egret, Black Vulture, Arctic Tern, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Dickcissel, and Yellow-headed Blackbird. Region 3 also had a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. An intriguing report of martin seen in Region 3 at the late date of 5 Nov is either a record late Purple Martin or something more exotic. The bird was photographed. We will keep you posted if there are any further developments. Region 4 added two sightings of Black Vulture and a Stilt Sandpiper, a possible first for the Region. In Region 5 birders also found a Black Vulture as well as a Yellow-throated Warbler. The warbler occurred in late November, an

odd time for a southern species in New York. However, the Yellow-throated Warbler has a reputation for late fall vagrancy into the northeast. Region 6 added a Three-toed Woodpecker and a summer leftover Marbled Godwit. Region 7 had a Barrow's Goldeneye and a remarkable number of jaegers on Lake Champlain, including four Parasitics, four Pomarines, and the second Regional Long-tailed Jaeger. What is really interesting is that a jaeger flight was predicted at this location 25 years ago! Read Mike Peterson's account of this event for the whole story. In Region 8, a Western Kingbird provided only the fourth record ever for that Region. Two Clay-colored Sparrows and the previously mentioned Boreal Chickadee were in Region 9. The chickadee was the Region's first since 1981. Tropical storm-related sightings in Region 10 included a White-faced Storm-Petrel (reportedly documented though details not yet submitted), multiple Sandwich Terns, and nine Sooty Terns. Other birds were Purple Gallinule, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Mountain Bluebird and one of the most intriguing, a Barred Owl found within the limits of New York City. Occasionally this species will occur during the winter in The Bronx close to the Westchester border, but this one was in Brooklyn!

My choice for bird of the season (BOTS) goes to the Cave Swallows found in Regions 2 and 10. Pending action by NYSARC on last year's Region 10 sighting, this season's birds could provide the third and fourth records ever in New York. The Cave Swallows this fall were part of a much larger movement into the northeast. Reported sightings also came from Ontario, Quebec, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Virginia, No. Carolina, and Michigan. (Lehman, P. 1999. *Birder's Journal* 8(6):286).

