

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SPRING SEASON 2002

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Weather Effects

After an exceptionally mild winter, March was more seasonable though still with above average temperatures. Coolest relative to averages were Regions 1 & 10, at opposite ends of the state. Windy conditions were noted in three Regions, resulting in the loss of power in Region 7 and the loss of two eagle nests in Region 1. Goose and dabbling migration peaked two to three weeks ahead of schedule.

The middle third of April was summer-like in most Regions, prompting early arrivals of several species. Then the weather turned much cooler, virtually ruining chances for a large Broad-winged Hawk flight at the Great Lakes watches though Braddock Bay had a respectable, if below average total.

As mild as the previous winter had been, May was just as cold and wet. Big Day participants in Regions 1, 2, 5 & 8 during the third week of May had to endure cold, damp, and even a few inches of snow! Even balmy Region 10 suffered a record low of 43 degrees F on the 19th. The May migration, the highlight of the year to so many birders, was generally disappointing, though Regions 1 & 7 noted some good concentrations of birds. Region 10 had what could be called a genuine "fallout". The reader is urged to check out Schiff and Wollin's account of this event.

The Early Migration

On the surface, it would appear from studying the Spring Arrival Dates tables that it was an exceptionally early migration across the board, that is waterbirds and landbirds, March, April and May migrants. An amazing 44 species were record early in one or more of the nine reporting Regions but there were also five species that arrived significantly late statewide with > 2 standard deviations. The five late species have average arrival dates in late April and May, when the weather this year was unseasonably cold. Thus, their lateness cannot be considered surprising. What is surprising, however, was the number of other late April and May migrants that arrived significantly early despite the weather.

No doubt, many of the late April migrants were already on our doorstep to the south of us, brought north by the summer-like warm spell in mid month. However, with continued adverse conditions, one would have thought the May migrants would be tardy, if anything, but such was not the case. Of course, simply because the first individual of a species arrives early, does not mean the rest will follow on its heels. Indeed, many birders noted a scarcity of neotropical migrant breeders in the latter half of May. Internet posts to various list services in New York heralded the early returns of some species such as Ruby-throated

Hummingbird and Indigo Bunting. Yet, birders hoping to see members of those species in their own neighborhoods usually had a considerable wait.

Miscellaneous

Inland shorebirding is usually hit or miss in New York. At Montezuma NWR, active management creates attractive habitat and provides a consistent source of shorebirds in the fall. Such efforts are sporadic in the spring and when they do occur, the benefits to shorebirds are secondary to the main purpose of invigorating the marsh. This is not meant to criticize the refuge system since managing water levels is not simply a matter of opening and closing a valve! Birders at Iroquois NWR in Region 1 were treated to a draw-down of Cayuga Pool this spring, resulting in fine shorebirding and the desire of this writer for consistent management to attract these birds every spring.

More details about the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker survey in Region 2 would be interesting. An unspecified number of observers found 432 individuals over two days there. That high number suggests that the survey occurred during the peak of their migration and possibly in an exceptionally good spring for them.

Region 5's Derby Hill is not only a great place for raptors, as many other migrants also whiz by. High counts of Eastern Phoebe and Baltimore Orioles among others have been tallied there in the past. Interesting this spring were the significant counts of so-called "resident" species Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, and House Finch which counts obviously included many migrants. Such data helps us to challenge those long-held assumptions.

Three southerners, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Mockingbird, and Carolina Wren, have been found in increasing numbers for many years and they now appear to be consolidating their foothold in northerly Region 6. Will they eventually become as common as another species of southern origin, Northern Cardinal, which many years ago slowly started moving north into New York? In southeastern New York, while not as numerous as the cardinal, the mockingbird is a solidly entrenched and decidedly common breeder.

Banding station highlights were provided in the Region 7 report. Region 9 had their first spring 1000+ Broad-winged Hawk flight. Is there a correlation with the low counts of this species on the Great Lakes this spring? Pelagic trip summaries were provided for Region 10. In addition, Big Day efforts confined within the borders of New York City tallied an impressive number of species. I guess it just seems like it is all concrete and asphalt!

Rarities

Except for western New York, the list of rarities was not as stellar as it has been in recent years. Waterfowl continued as a major source of excitement and discussion, especially in Region 10. It was there that yet another "Eurasian" Green-winged Teal was found but there was also one in Region 2 this spring. Barnacle Geese found in Regions 1 & 10 this spring have been reported numerous times in recent years. At what point do we consider them most likely to be

naturally occurring and not escapes? That is the question that NYSARC must deal with when (and if!) they receive reports of this species. The western race of *Branta bernicla*, known as "Black" Brant, was reported again in Region 10. Another subspecies, the "Richardson's" Canada Goose, produced a likely New York record count for spring in Region 1. Closing out the waterfowl discussion, a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck at a pond on Long Island would constitute a state-first, if accepted by NYSARC. Like the Barnacle Goose, this duck's population is growing so there may be some argument to counter the captive origin sentiment. A Western Grebe on Staten Island is very rare in New York with only six records accepted by NYSARC. However, if one assumes that all Western/Clark type grebe reports in the state are Westerns, which is not an unreasonable assumption, then Townsend's Warbler is even rarer than the grebe. Remarkably, Townsend's Warblers were found in both Regions 2 & 10 this spring. A Bicknell's Thrush, seen and more importantly heard in Region 10, is a species that usually slips through undetected during migration. A Tricolored Heron, only the second Dunlin for Sullivan County and a Yellow-headed Blackbird were highlights in Region 9, as was a Black-headed Gull, the latter also reported in Regions 1 & 10 where it is less unusual. In Region 8, Glossy Ibis, Wilson's Phalarope, and Yellow-throated Warbler provided the excitement while in Region 7, it was a first Franklin County Eurasian Wigeon, a Sandhill Crane, and a pair of Gray Partridges, the latter a Regional first for Atlas 2000. Region 6 countered with their own Eurasian Wigeon and Sandhill Crane and added an Orange-crowned Warbler and a rare outside the Adirondacks Black-backed Woodpecker. Laughing Gull, a very rare Franklin's Gull, three Sedge Wrens and Hoary Redpoll, were highlights in Region 5. The only Ross's Geese in the state were the two found in Region 3. In addition that Region had Glossy Ibis, Cattle Egret, and Marbled Godwit. A group of three American White Pelicans ranged widely in both Regions 1 & 2. Willet, Marbled Godwit, Laughing Gull, a very rare Franklin's Gull, a Sedge Wren, Summer Tanager and Brewer's Blackbird is a great list of discoveries in Region 2 that does not even include their best finds. Glossy Ibis, a first spring record of Pomarine Jaeger, a possible first Regional Fish Crow and three "Oregon" Juncos were the lesser highlights in Region 1. Two rare warblers, Region 1's second ever "Audubon's" Yellow-rumped Warbler and Region 2's first Black-throated Gray Warbler were most unusual. There are only about ten records of the latter in New York. Two Arctic Terns and another Regional first, a female Painted Bunting were additional booty enjoyed by Region 2 birders. Although the Great Lakes hawkwatching was not as productive in quantity this spring, the quality was exceptional. Both Regions 1 & 2 had reports of Swainson's Hawk and Mississippi Kite and Region 1 added a Black Vulture, oddly missing from the Lake Ontario watches.

The highlight at the watches this spring though, and my choice for the Bird of the Season, is Region 1's Ferruginous Hawk. This bird passed over the Ripley hawkwatch on Lake Erie 11 Apr and, if accepted by NYSARC, will constitute a first record for New York.