

REGION 3 – FINGER LAKES

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Summer 2002 was warmer than normal in every month. June was the fourth rainiest on record, keeping water levels high in the Region's rivers. However, rainfall was only 60% of normal in July and August, and water levels dropped to expose shoals and mudflats.

For many years, birders in the Ithaca area have conducted the Ithaca June Count, using basically the same approach and counting methods as used on Christmas Bird Counts. These data have been the foundation for the Region's summer data over those years. This year, however, the data were not available at the time of the writing of this report. As a result, I have made no comparison of this year's local breeding bird population indicators with previous years' numbers. However, I have made the usual comparisons for transient species, for species little affected by the Ithaca June Count, such as those occurring in marsh habitat, and for species whose late summer flocking behaviors produce such large numbers that the Ithaca June Count numbers for them become relatively insignificant.

Pied-billed Grebes have steadily increased in the Region since I began keeping records. Although the increases have not been statistically significant every year, they were this year, capping four consecutive years of increases. Management of the wetlands in both the Montezuma Wetlands Complex and Montezuma NWR has certainly helped this threatened species, as well as several other marsh species.

Management of Double-crested Cormorants seems to be equally successful. The objective of reducing numbers in Lake Ontario seems to be affecting the number of post-breeding-season birds occurring in the Finger Lakes Region. The number reported this year may only be about half of that reported two years ago.

Great Blue Heron numbers dropped dramatically from a year ago. Perhaps the high river levels of spring and June, which certainly diminished the number of fishing locations available, caused many of the birds to push on to other areas for nesting. Great Egrets also appeared in lower numbers than last year, though they did not show the drastic decrease that the Great Blue Herons showed. The six Least Bitterns observed at Montezuma were the most seen in the Region in nearly a decade. They were so reliably observable that people went to the Refuge expecting to see a Least Bittern. Black-crowned Night-Herons were present in good numbers. There were no rare wanderers from the south reported this summer.

Another marsh denizen present in better numbers this summer was Ruddy Duck. The most unusual duck reports were of a female Bufflehead at Montezuma in early June and again in early July, and Jesse Ellis's report of a Greater Scaup on Cayuga Lake near Stewart Park at the end of the period. One Snow Goose tarried throughout the summer at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex.

Fred Sibley was surprised to find a large number of Virginia Rails calling at

Texas Hollow Bird Sanctuary. His discovery helped the Region total to its highest level in five years. In contrast, Common Moorhens were reported at their lowest level. It is hard to say whether water levels were unfavorable for nesting, or more cover for hiding was related to their poor showing. The bird of the season was the **King Rail** that sang and occasionally walked into view at Montezuma for more than three weeks.

It was not a great shorebird summer, but Baird's Sandpiper and American Woodcock were reported in their highest numbers in five years. American Golden-Plover, Semipalmated Plover and Stilt Sandpiper had their lowest numbers in that period. Upland Sandpiper seemed to rebound from two years of very low numbers. The most exciting shorebird was **American Avocet**. Jack Brubaker found seven on the breakwater at Watkins Glen and Joe Brin and Bernie Carr simultaneously watched three at Montezuma. All of the avocets departed before the next day. Another great find was Pete Hosner's Red-necked Phalarope.

Very intriguing were the two **Wilson's Phalaropes** that Bard Prentiss and Jay McGowan flushed from a roadside puddle. At least one of them was an adult female. The date of 20 June is midway between recent spring departures and fall arrivals. *Bull's Birds of New York State* classifies a bird recorded on 19 June as an early fall migrant.

Bonaparte's Gulls were the rarest representatives of their family. A new nesting colony of Ring-billed Gulls sprang up on a large pile of gravel left in the Chemung River in downtown Elmira. While high water eroded the sides of the island away, several pairs of the gulls began raising nestlings and fledged at least 20. A not-quite-mature Herring Gull also constructed a nest, but apparently did not lay eggs. By summer's end vegetation was taking over the island, so repeat nesting seems doubtful.

For the third summer in a row, a single Forster's Tern appeared in the Region. It was a fine year for Black Terns at Montezuma, with as many as 30 counted at one time.

Geo Kloppel found two fledgling Northern Saw-whet Owls while atlasing in Buttermilk Falls State Park. At least two Whip-poor-wills were again singing near Addison through mid-June. Another was heard near Ithaca in mid-July.

John and Sue Gregoire banded and photographed early migrating Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Swainson's Thrush. Like the Swainson's Thrush, Philadelphia Vireo migrants rarely appear before September. Meena Haribal found two on 25 August. Jay McGowan found another on 27 August. John and Sue Gregoire also banded and photographed an early Cape May Warbler in late August.

Bob Fogg found a "Brewster's" Warbler on 12 June. With the complete absence of nesting Golden-winged Warblers in the Region, the occurrence of "Brewster's" Warbler might be considered rarer than the "Lawrence's" hybrid. The recessive genes related to the "Lawrence's" form may be able to persist for a long time in the Blue-winged population that currently occupies the Region.

Jay and Kevin McGowan located a Yellow-breasted Chat near Ithaca on 1 June. Dan Lebbin had the best warbler find, an early Connecticut Warbler at Sapsucker

Woods on 26 August, confirmed by other observers the following day.

Jesse Ellis found a late Orchard Oriole at Myers Point on 20 August. This regionally scarce breeder, if not usually departed long before that date, at least becomes very inconspicuous by then. The same can be said of the Henslow's Sparrow that Steve and Susan Fast found in Danby, also on 20 August. Allison and Jeff Wells watched and listened to a singing White-winged Crossbill in Etna through 6 June, hoping in vain for confirmation of breeding.

The following species listing includes comparisons of observed bird populations in the Region between summer 2001 and summer 2002. A "+" at the end of the species account indicates an increase; a "-" indicates a decrease. Species accounts with neither symbol indicate that the species either did not demonstrate a significant change in reported numbers or the change was a decrease caused by the lack of Ithaca June Count data in 2002. Unless otherwise noted, the cited comparisons showed statistically significant changes ($X^2 > 3.84$; $P = 0.05$). A discussion of my methodology and its limitations can be found in the Region 3 report that appeared in the December 1999 issue of *The Kingbird*.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

EWMA – Erwin WMA, STEU; KH – Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory, SCHU; LoPd – Lowe Pd; MNWR – Montezuma NWR; MWC – Montezuma Wetlands Complex; MyPt – Myers Pt; NeCr – Newtown Creek, CHEM; RP – Riverfront P, CHEM; SaWo – Sapsucker Woods; SCF – Seneca County Fairgrounds; StP – Stewart P, TOMP; TCAH – The Center at Horseheads, CHEM.

LOONS – DUCKS

Pied-billed Grebe: max 20 MWC 20 Jul; +.

Double-crested Cormorant: last MNWR 3 Jun; arr StP 12 Jul; max 58 StP 29 Aug.

Least Bittern: max 6 MNWR 24 Aug (MHa), high.

Great Blue Heron: max 25 MNWR 15 Jun, low.

Great Egret: max 25 MNWR 21 Aug; -.

Cattle Egret: Tyre 7 Jul.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: arr 3 MNWR 20 Jul; max 7 MNWR 24 Jul; +.

Turkey Vulture: max 3 Woodhull 13 Jul, low.

SNOW GOOSE: 1 MWC thru.

Canada Goose: max 107 Horseheads Gravel Pits CHEM 10 Jun, low.

Wood Duck: max 28 TCAH 23 Aug, low.

Green-winged Teal: arr MNWR 17 Aug; max 20 MWC 21 Aug; +.

Redhead: max 6 MNWR 24 Jun; high.

Ring-necked Duck: max 2 MNWR 10 Aug; only report.

GREATER SCAUP: arr StP 30 Aug (JEL).

BUFFLEHEAD: MNWR 7 Jun (BF) and 3 Jul.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: max 2 MNWR 1 Aug, low.

Merlin: arr Cayuga Heights 23 Aug (SHam!).

KING RAIL: MNWR 2 Jun (MAn, BF, PH, MMe) to 24 Jun (fide JR).

Virginia Rail: max 16 Texas Hollow Bird Sanctuary SCHU 6 Aug (FS), high; +.

Com. Moorhen: max 8 MNWR 14 Jul; -.

Black-bellied Plover: max 5 MNWR 3

Jun; last Geneva 7 Jun; arr MyPt 16 Aug.

Am. Golden-Plover: arr MNWR 21 Aug; -.

Semipalmated Plover: last MyPt 6 Jun; arr MNWR 19 Jul; max 4 MNWR 24 Jul, low; -.

Killdeer: max 57 NeCr 1 Aug, low.

AMERICAN AVOCET: 7 Village Marina SCHU 15 Aug (JaBr); 3 MNWR 15 Aug (JoBr, BC report to NYSARC); +.

Greater Yellowlegs: arr MNWR 5 Jul; max 10 Seybolt Rd Bait Ponds SENE 26 Jul; -.

Lesser Yellowlegs: arr 3 MNWR 5 Jul; max 12 MNWR 14 Jul, low; -.

Solitary Sandpiper: arr 4 NeCr 10 Jun (DR), early; max 6 MNWR 10 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: max 12 SCF 20 Jun; last Seneca Falls Airport 24 Jun; +.

Ruddy Turnstone: arr & max 6 Long Pt SP 2 Jun; last MyPt 6 Jun; arr MyPt 26 Jul.

Sanderling: arr MyPt 14 Aug; max 2 MyPt 17 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: max 40 MNWR 2 Jun; last 5 MyPt 6 Jun; arr MNWR 14 Jul; -.

Least Sandpiper: last MyPt 4 Jun; arr 6 RP 18 Jul; max 33 MNWR 24 Jul; +.

White-rumped Sandpiper: last & max 3 MyPt 5 Jun; arr RP 30 Aug.

Baird's Sandpiper: arr & max 5 MNWR 20 Aug.

Pectoral Sandpiper: arr MNWR 14 Jul; max 4 MWC 21 Aug, low.

Dunlin: last MyPt 4 Jun.

Stilt Sandpiper: arr 2 MNWR 19 Jul (SHab), early; max 3 MNWR 27 Aug.

Short-billed Dowitcher: arr 3 MNWR 19

Jul; max 10 MWC 21 Aug; +.

Long-billed Dowitcher: arr & max 4 MNWR 23 Aug.

Wilson's Snipe: max 15 MNWR 23 Aug; +.

WILSON'S PHALAROPE: 2 SCF 20 Jun (JMcGo, BP); arr MNWR 17 Aug (GC, DS, MV); +.

Red-necked Phalarope: arr MNWR 27 Aug (PH).

Bonaparte's Gull: last Geneva 7 Jun; arr StP 12 Jul; max 2 StP 14 Jul.

Ring-billed Gull: max 501 Seneca L SP 2 Aug; +.

Herring Gull: max 72 Clute Memorial P SCHU 7 Jun (MF, KR), high; +.

Great Black-backed Gull: arr Long Pt SP 3 Jul (RB, MMe), early; max 3 StP 24 Aug.

Caspian Tern: last 2 MyPt 2 Jun; arr 4 MyPt 30 Jun (RB), early; max 50 Treman Marina SP 9 Aug; -.

Com. Tern: max 3 Dryden L P 3 Aug.

FORSTER'S TERN: arr StP 27 Aug.

Black Tern: max 30 MNWR 24 Jul (SHab, PH, MMe), high; +.

DOVES – WOODPECKERS

Rock Dove: max 62 Elmira 16 Aug, low.

Mourning Dove: max 38 Horseheads 28 Aug, low.

N. Saw-whet Owl: max 2 Buttermilk Falls SP 11 Jul (GK), high.

Com. Nighthawk: max 50 RP 30 Aug; -.

Whip-poor-will: max 2 Addison 15 May; Eco Village TOMP 16 Jul.

Red-headed Woodpecker: max 2 Summerhill 15 Jun.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 3 EWMA 7 Jun, low.

Downy Woodpecker: max 6 KH 4 Jul, low.

Hairy Woodpecker: max 4 EWMA 7 Jun, low.

N. Flicker: max 7 KH 25 Aug, low.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: last LoPd 7 Jun;

arr SaWo 23 Aug (MC!).

E. Wood-Pewee: max 7 Cornell U 28 Aug, low.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: arr KH 31 Jul (J&SGr ph), early.

Willow Flycatcher: max 2 TCAH 18 Jul, low.

Philadelphia Vireo: arr & max 2 StP 25 Aug (MHa); high & early.

Com. Raven: max 36 Elmira Correctional Facility Clubhouse CHEM 21 Jul.

Tree Swallow: max 1000 MNWR 20 Jul.

N. Rough-winged Swallow: max 200 StP 26 Jul; +.

Bank Swallow: max 25 StP 24 Aug, low.

Cliff Swallow: max 10 Addison 29 Jun; +.

Black-capped Chickadee: max 15 Caroline 3 Aug, low.

White-breasted Nuthatch: max 4 Elmira 7 Jun, low.

E. Bluebird: max 8 StP 25 Aug, low.

Swainson's Thrush: arr KH 7 Aug (J&SGr ph), early.

European Starling: max 1800 TCAH 23 Aug; +.

Cedar Waxwing: max 29 Caroline 8 Jun, low.

WARBLERS

"BREWSTER'S" WARBLER: Dryden 12 Jun (BF).

Tennessee Warbler: arr KH 24 Aug.

CAPE MAY WARBLER: KH 27 Aug (J&SGr ph), early.

Blackpoll Warbler: last LoPd 4 Jun.

CONNECTICUT WARBLER: SaWo 26 Aug (DL!) and 27 Aug (MAn, EB, PH!).

Mourning Warbler: max 6 Summerhill State Forest CAYU 1 Jun.

Com. Yellowthroat: max 17 Caroline 3 Aug, low.

Hooded Warbler: max 6 EWMA 7 Jun.

Wilson's Warbler: arr SaWo 27 Aug.

Canada Warbler: max 10 Shindagin Hollow State Forest TOMP 4 Aug.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT: East Ithaca Recreation Way TOMP 1 Jun

(J&KMcGo).

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

E. Towhee: max 7 EWMA 21 Jun, low.

Chipping Sparrow: max 20 MWC 20 Jul,
low.

Field Sparrow: max 4 Elmira 28 Jun,
low.

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 6 SCF 20
Jun; last STEU 4 Jul.

Henslow's Sparrow: max 2 Caroline 8
Jun; last Danby 20 Aug (S&SF), late.

Swamp Sparrow: max 4 Caroline 8 Jun,

low.

Indigo Bunting: max 5 Woodhull 29 Jun,
low.

Red-winged Blackbird: max 40,000
MNWR 24 Aug (MHa), high; +.

Orchard Oriole: last MyPt 20 Aug (JEl),
late.

House Finch: max 4 LoPd 7 Jun, low.

WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL: last
Etna 6 Jun (AWe).

House Sparrow: max 30 NeCr 25 Aug,
low.