

REGION 7 – ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

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This summer was a season of seeming extremes. Complaints alternated from too much heat and humidity to too much rain, and back again. But, as we'll see, Regional weather may not have been all that bad or unusual. The first of June was rainy and cool, with a high of only 57F and a low of 48 at Plattsburgh. A warming trend began 21 June and it became genuinely hot between 23 and 26 June, reaching a high of 94 on the 26th, with several days of unusual smog. Another hot spell began 13 July, reaching 87 by the 15th. There was a lengthy stretch of hot, muggy weather between 30 June and 11 August, then it became clear and hot. Overnight between 3 and 4 August there was up to 3" of rain in parts of the Region, yet it remained dry in other areas, like Elizabethtown, in the shadow of the High Peaks. That was followed by heavy rains everywhere on 5 August, with up to 4" in places and flood warnings issued in Clinton and Essex counties. After an afternoon shower the next

day, storm drains were overflowing and three feet of sand at the Port Douglass beach eroded into Lake Champlain due to a faulty storm drain. There was more rain 10-11 August. As a result of all of the high water rushing down the Boquet River, four young men drowned at Split Rock Falls swimming hole on 12 August. By then the weather had become clear and hot once again. Despite more showers 29 August, Champlain stood at a relatively normal 96.04' at season's end, which typically ended with sun on the 30th, clouds on the 31st. Although the weather seemed extreme for much of the summer, precipitation averages for the Boquet River watershed in 2003 were close to 1971-2000 NOAA averages at Elizabethtown, and even with the 2-2.5" of local rainfall between 5 and 11 August, the Boquet stayed within its banks. Apparently, the summer wasn't all that wet. For August, the monthly total was 3.37", with 3.13" in the Boquet watershed and compared with a 1971-2000 average at Elizabethtown of 3.88".

Observers again moved out across the four northeastern counties and into more of the 698 Atlas 2000 blocks in Region 7 during this penultimate summer of the project. As expected, more volunteers are becoming familiar with a wider range of breeding species and are finally beginning to challenge the 1980-85 team. The records of a few species – obviously Canada Goose, Bald Eagle, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Wild Turkey, Palm Warbler and perhaps even Evening Grosbeak – are a quantum leap ahead of the first Atlas. But it's also encouraging to see more reports of Least Bittern, Willow and Yellow-bellied flycatchers, Philadelphia Vireo, Carolina Wren and Bicknell's Thrush. And not only the boreal warblers, (Tennessee, Cape May and even Wilson's) are turning up, but Pine and Mourning warbler records are improving, as well.

Part of this can be explained by the passage of time and the learning curve, but much is due to now-experienced observers moving out of their original squares, often in more populous and open parts of the Region near their homes, to explore wilder habitats with fresh avian variety. Their original blocks along Champlain at an "adequate" 76+ species (and several at 100+), Bill Krueger and Charlie Mitchell were among those who set out to explore. In a new square in southwestern Clinton County they confirmed Merlins with fledged young at High Bank: "One in particular seemed to have to struggle for balance with fluttering wings." They also found Black-backed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Tennessee and Palm warblers and Lincoln's Sparrow. Such are the rewards of finishing your original assignment early.

Two other areas are worthy of special mention, not only for their breeding birds, but also for concentrations of waterbirds, shorebirds, gulls and terns. The first is the oft-mentioned Chazy River Lands, between the Great Chazy and Little Chazy rivers. This summer the peripatetic Krueger and Mitchell, along with Suzy Johnson, managed to locate juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron, three summering Snow Geese, five shorebird species (including 21 Lesser Yellowlegs), up to four Caspian Terns (one with food), some 40 Common Terns (one also carrying food) and Black Tern both there and at nearby Point au Fer. Of notable interest was a **Savannah**

Sparrow singing a hybrid song from 6-17 July at the site where the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow was found last summer. As Krueger described, "Seen through a scope while singing from a fence post and later on an electrical wire, this bird threw its head back and sang a song that spliced the first half of the Savannah's to the second half of the Nelson's. Both halves, especially the Nelson's *tshhhhhhhhsuh*, were perfect. Only the song, not the bird, appeared to be a hybrid."

In the Fall 1999 report we suggested, "The Town of Willsboro has provided public access to an outstanding birding area with the opening of Noblewood Park on the south bank of the Boquet River delta. We invite observers to visit the black sand beaches, sandbars and neighboring mixed forest..." Since then, a few birders have begun to visit, and subsequent reports suggest that all managed to find interesting birds, regardless of season. This summer, however, Matt Medlar finally did real justice to Noblewood and proved what a gem it is. Although his first visit was on 19 June, when he had the first of three Great Egret sightings, it was not until July and August that he began to make almost daily trips to the mouth of the river, with perhaps five other birders also making visits. See the species accounts for details, but highlights included 15 shorebirds, including White-rumped and Baird's sandpipers; six species of gulls, including Little Gull and **Black-headed Gull**; and three terns, including Caspian Tern. The last, Caspian Tern, is of special interest since seven of the nine species of colonial waterbirds known to nest on Four Brothers – all but Cattle Egret and Glossy Ibis, which normally feed inland – frequented Noblewood Park this summer. The park is just five miles SSW of the islands, which are clearly visible on the lake. This summer, Caspian Terns were found at Noblewood on six different days between 26 July and 16 August, when three were reported, with birds in both basic and alternate plumage. Whether they constituted a tenth colonial-nesting species at Four Brothers cannot be known, The Nature Conservancy being unable to provide for new management of the colonies and the 20-year census no longer done by High Peaks Audubon Society, Inc.

A total of just 172 species was reported, the lowest of the four summers of Atlas 2000, although a few more may show up on tardy Atlas forms. Other rarities included a **Sandhill Crane** flying over Paul Smiths on 19 July, calling high overhead, and an adult male **Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** on Limekiln Road, Keene, on 5 July after the passage of Tropical Storm Bill.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

Adks – Adirondacks; AP – Ausable Pt WMA; CR – Chazy Ri; FB – Ferd's Bog; NP – Noblewood P; PtF – Point au Fer; TL – Tupper L.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Snow Goose: 3 CR 17-28 Jul (BK), present all summer.

Lesser Scaup: TL 30 Aug (CD), near shore of Raquette Pd.

Com. Goldeneye: AP 7 Jul (DR); 2 hens + hen & 3 yg Willsboro Bay 7 Jul (MM); 8 AP 31 Jul (EV); 3 NP 30 Aug (LL, BM, MM), good Champlain finds; none from Adks.

Com. Loon: several basic & alt NP, Port Kent, Willsboro Bay 4 Jul-29 Aug, presumed Champlain nonbreeders.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 600 Willsboro Bay 20 Jun (MM); hundreds dead Four Brothers & S. Sister, VT, late Jul-Aug, VT researchers testing a sample of 130 dead birds (WCAX News 21-22 Sep, North Country Public Radio 22 Sep).

Am. Bittern: AP 7 Jul (DR), chased by Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

Least Bittern: Scotion Cr 4 Jun (NO), close approach by canoe.

Great Egret: NP 19 Jun, 26 Jul, 8 Aug (MM), presumed from Four Bros; TL 24 Jul (CD).

Black-crowned Night-Heron: Willsboro 16 Jun (MM); juv CR 28 Jul (SJ, BK); 2 NP 16 Aug (DR).

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Bald Eagle: Bradley Pd, Deer R Flow, L Alice, Little Tupper L, Peru, TL, West River Marsh - only suggestive of distribution.

Golden Eagle: near Chazy L 20 Jun (J&RH); ad Wickham Marsh 13 Jul (DR), chased by Com. Grackle.

Merlin: yg High Bank CLIN 27 Jun-1 Aug (BK); Plattsburgh 7 Jul (J&RH); yg Piseco L 18 Jul-5 Aug (BD, CK); found dead Plattsburgh, tested positive for WNV

12 Aug (*Press-Republican*); also Floodwood, Keene, NP - only suggestive of distribution.

Com. Moorhen: Scotion Cr 4 Jun (NO), only report, surprising.

SANDHILL CRANE: Paul Smiths 19 Jul (BM), flying s, calling high overhead, 1st FRAN record.

Black-bellied Plover: arr NP 13 Aug (MM), flying s, early ESSE.

Semipalmated Plover: last CR 6 Jun (SJ, BK); arr NP 22 Jul (MM) thru; max 5 NP 5 Aug (MM), record high ESSE.

Greater Yellowlegs: arr 3 CR 17 Jul (BK, CM); NP 22 Jul-17 Aug; max 7 NP 23 Jul, record high ESSE.

Lesser Yellowlegs: arr NP 10 Jul-15 Aug; max 21 CR 21 Jul (BK, CM); 6 NP 11 Aug (MM), record high ESSE.

Solitary Sandpiper: arr 2 NP 16 Aug (DR).

Sanderling: arr 3 alt ads NP 24 Jul, early ESSE; max 21 NP 27 Jul, record high ESSE; thru (MM).

Semipalmated Sandpiper: last CR 6 Jun (SJ, BK); arr 2 ad NP 11 Jul (MM) thru; max 12 CR 17 Jul (BK, CM).

Western Sandpiper: arr NP 17 Aug (J&PT).

Least Sandpiper: last 4 CR 6 Jun (SJ, BK); arr 10 ad NP 11 Jul (MM) thru.

White-rumped Sandpiper: arr ad NP 17 Aug (LL, BM, MM), early ESSE.

Baird's Sandpiper: arr 4 juv NP 28 Aug (MM) thru, record high ESSE.

Pectoral Sandpiper: arr NP 5-6 Aug (MM).

Short-billed Dowitcher: arr alt ad *L.g. hendersoni* NP 27 Jul (MM), early ESSE.

Little Gull: arr 2 Port Kent 7 Aug (DR), early ESSE; 2nd winter NP 14-16 Aug (MM, DR); ad NP 16 Aug (DR); 2 AP 18 Aug (J&RH); outstanding.

BLACK-HEADED GULL: alt ad NP 6, 9, 11-12 Aug (J&RH, MM), 1st ESSE & 2nd Reg record and an outstanding find. (N.B. the record in Carleton 1999 should be deleted; not observed in NYS waters, cf. *The Kingbird* 40:49, Winter 1990).

Bonaparte's Gull: NP 10 Jul thru, with numbers growing to 1000 by 11 Aug, max 1000+ 14 Aug, ESSE record high, declining to 250+ by 30 Aug (MM).

Caspian Tern: arr 4 CR 6-7, 28 Jul; 1 carrying food 17 Jul (BK); 1-3 basic & alt NP 26 Jul-16 Aug (MM, DR, EV), origin?; suspected nesting on Popasquash I and/or Young I, VT, in 2000.

Com. Tern: Upper Chateaugay L 6 Jul (MH); 12 CR 17 Jul (BK, CM); CR 26 Jul, carrying food; max 40+ CR 28 Jul (SJ, BK); 2 alt ad & begging juv NP 8 Aug; 2 ad 14 Aug; ad 15 Aug (MM); 6 AP 18 Aug; "large #" 28 Aug (J&RH); 2 basic, 1 alt NP 30 Aug (LL, BM, MM). Can all be nesting on Popasquash I, VT, or is there a closer alternative, especially for NP birds?

Black Tern: 5 CR 26 Jun (BK, CM), 2 at Gravelle's, 3 at PtF; 1-2 NP 30 Aug (LL, BM, MM), encouraging due to loss of historic colonies at Ticonderoga Marsh & TL Marsh.

PIGEONS – WOODPECKERS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Port Kent 1-7 Jul (DR); Olmstedville early Jul (EG); the tough one.

E. Screech-Owl: Keene 21 Aug (J&PT), 1500' elevation, but where previously found.

Com. Nighthawk: 3 Miner 3 Jun (NO, MS); 3 Ausable Chasm 6 Jul; max 8 Ausable R 14 Jul (DR); several Peru 9 Aug (E&HF), giving booming display.

Whip-poor-will: 7 Walker Rd Whallonsburg 10 Jul (MM), noteworthy number.

Chimney Swift: max 40-50 Willsboro 6:30 p.m. 11 Aug (MM), record high ESSE.

Red-headed Woodpecker: Murtaugh Hill

feeder, Altona 11 Jun (CS), only report.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: Monty Bay 26 Aug (BK), only report.

Black-backed Woodpecker: Paul Smiths 7 Jun (J&PT), on nest; Standish Rd CLIN 27 Jun (BK, CM); Rollins Pd 12 Aug (BE); seems low.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: 6 locations sw CLIN (BK, CM), good Atlas finds.

Willow Flycatcher: m Upper Works 10 Jul (J&PT), unexpected in High Peaks.

SCISSOR-TAILED FLYCATCHER: ad m Limekiln Rd Keene 5 Jul (E&JP, J&PT, A&ST) following Tropical Storm Bill; 1st ESSE & Reg record.

Philadelphia Vireo: Avalanche Camp 15 Jun (J&PT); RR bed Block 5894B 16 Jun (BK) responded to tape; True Brook Rd CLIN 17 Jun (BK, CM); Upper Works 10 Jul (J&PT); all welcome Atlas finds.

Com. Raven: NP 27 Jul (MM) chased by E. Kingbird; 2 CR 12 Aug (BK, MM, CM), both suggestive of increases right along L Champlain.

Purple Martin: Miner 3 Jul (NO, MS); NP 27 Jul (J&PT); only reports.

swallow sp.: 200+ of the 4 species NP 27 Jul (J&PT) feeding & resting on sandbar.

Cliff Swallow: 4 yg fledged Peru 21 Aug (EF), late.

Boreal Chickadee: Couchsachrage, Elk L, Yard Mt; all expected locales.

Carolina Wren: pr CH 19 Aug thru (NO), only summer report.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: NP 19 Jun (MM), ideal habitat.

WARBLERS

Golden-winged Warbler: ad m with fledglings Willsboro 19 Jun (MM), only report.

Tennessee Warbler: singing m Ausable Lks 12 Jul (J&PT); pr True Brook Rd CLIN 18 Jul (BK); both welcome finds.

Cape May Warbler: singing m Keene 6 Jun (J&PT), only report.

Palm Warbler: Standish Rd CLIN 17 & 24 Jun (BK, CM); singing m FB 23 Jun (BC); singing m Sanford L bog 10 Jul (J&PT); pr Churubusco (J&RH); all good Atlas finds.

Wilson's Warbler: sw CLIN Jun (BK) in suitable habitat.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

Savannah Sparrow: singing m CR 6-17 Jul (BK, CM), giving hybrid song, *intro*.

Lincoln's Sparrow: The Gulf CLIN 18 Jun (J&RH), bordering Québec.

Red Crossbill: Miner Dam 8 Jul (NO,

MS), pr & juv feeding on [green] White Spruce cones.

Evening Grosbeak: Akey Rd, Cheney Hill, Duane Ctr, L Titus, Port Kent, feeding yg Peru feeder 19 Jul (EF); banded Elizabethtown 23 Oct 1997 (JP), retrapped Jenny L SARA 28 Jul 2003 (RY).

ADDENDA

Brant: 50 Westport 30 May 2003 (MM), flying n.

WILLET: CR 31 May 2003 (BK, CM), heard only.