

REGION 8 – HUDSON-MOHAWK

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Summer 2004 was characterized by mild, rainy weather. Temperatures for all three months were consistent with normal regional averages, with the notable exception that only one day, 9 July, rose above 90° F at Albany International Airport. Some amount of rain fell on nearly half of the summer's days, with accumulations increasing from a few scattered showers in June to regular downpours of several inches in July and August. Many humans welcomed the comfortable temperatures, while climatic effects on birds were likely minimal. Overall, no storm system seemed to adversely affect breeding or juvenile dispersal.

An unusually high number of Great Egrets entered the area this summer, with many occurring far from traditional haunts along the Hudson River. Compared with only three reports of single birds last summer, observers noticed dozens this year, beginning in June and continuing into early fall. It would be interesting to compare these numbers with reports from adjacent regions and states to determine if some significant movement occurred this summer.

Near the confluence of the Hudson and the Mohawk rivers in Albany County, Rich Guthrie discovered a **Laughing Gull** among a large flock of more common gull species. Rich also discovered the first Regional record of this species back in 1979. This particular immature gull represented the 12th record for the Region.

Some interesting finds stemmed from separate birding trips to the Saratoga County Airport this summer, including reports of breeding populations of Horned Lark, Vesper Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow. Saratoga County contains some of the last strongholds of grassland habitat in our Region, and the airport is an encouraging example of how so-called 'human habitats,' when properly managed, can be beneficial to both humans and birds.

Bob Yunick, who had a rough summer due to frequent bear raids on his long-term banding station at Jenny Lake, Saratoga County, reported a serious outbreak of conjunctivitis among Purple Finches. While this species appears to be recovering from a population crash that occurred in the early nineties, Yunick observed several individuals this summer unable to forage due to swollen infected eyes.

The close of this summer marks the end of the field work for the five-year Breeding Bird Atlas, and we send our thanks to Jane Graves and Mark Fitzsimmons for leading our Region's effort. Region 8 is the largest in the state and we benefited from some 200 volunteers, including a hard-core troupe of 30-40 year-to-year regulars, who managed to each complete several of our 755 Atlas blocks.

While not perfect, citizen science projects like the Atlas provide a more accurate estimate of species distribution than casual reporting alone. For example, because of increased searching, we have had many times the number of reports for Common Loon, American Bittern, Northern Goshawk, Common Moorhen,

Whip-poor-will, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Worm-eating Warbler, Grasshopper Sparrow and Evening Grosbeak. It was during an Atlas trip that Cedar Stanistreet discovered a pair of **Boreal Chickadees** on Crane Mountain in Warren County this June.

Several species reported during Atlas 2000 represent breeding species that were not reproducing in Region 8 during the 1980s, including Mute Swan, Double-crested Cormorant, Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, White-winged Crossbill and Pine Siskin. We've also experienced significant range expansions for Red-bellied Woodpecker (one record in the 1980s vs. 195 records today), as well as for Osprey, Fish Crow, Common Raven, Carolina Wren and Hooded Warbler.

Not all species have increased, however. One striking example involves the near extirpation of Red-headed Woodpeckers. Once fairly common, with the Mohawk Valley serving as a core breeding range in the state, there are today many younger birders who have never once observed this bird in our Region. For such an easily identifiable species, it is surprising that it remained completely unreported during Atlas 2000. Additionally, grassland nesters, such as Upland Sandpiper, Vesper and Henslow's sparrows, have continued to decline.

It's satisfying to have a better understanding of the birds that occur in our Region, but major undertakings such as the Breeding Bird Atlas also remind us that serious conservation challenges remain unsolved. Like many other regions, central eastern New York faces the worrisome effects of suburban sprawl, increased use of our rivers and lakes, recreational and developmental pressures on high peak habitats such as the Catskills and Adirondacks, as well as such familiar challenges as pollution, habitat fragmentation and changes in agricultural methods. My hope is that the hard work of the many volunteers who contributed to this long-term project aids the protection of our Region's bird life.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Devoe Bird Club monthly sighting reports, Steve Chorvas, Paul Conner, Bill Cook, Mark Fitzsimmons, Jane Graves, Rich Guthrie, Hudson Mohawk Bird Club's Birdline of Eastern New York, Berna & Stan Lincoln, Andrew Mason, Barb Putman, Kathryn Schneider, Cedar Stanistreet, Alison Van Keuren, Carol & Owen Whitby, Will Yandik, Robert Yunick.

ABBREVIATIONS

COH – New St Flats, T Cohoes ALBA; EPH – T Ephratah FULT; HR – Hudson Ri; JL – Jenny L SARA; JOH – T Johnstown FULT; MR – Mohawk Ri; OPP – T Oppenheim FULT; QUE – T Queensbury WARR.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Blue-winged Teal: 4 COH 25 Aug.

Bufflehead: f Waterford SARA 25 May-4 Jul, flightless but surviving.

Com. Merganser: Hoosic Ri RENS 18 Jul, with 8 young.

Wild Turkey: many observers reported as much as 50% fewer than last summer.

Com. Loon: Fonda WARR 1 Jul; Mayfield FULT 2 Jul, with chicks; 2 Sacandaga L FULT 22 Aug; 11 additional Atlas blocks.

Double-crested Cormorant: breeding Copake L COLU Jun.

Am. Bittern: Hebron WASH 12 Jun; 10 additional Atlas blocks.

Least Bittern: Dresden WASH 6 Jul; OPP FULT 17 Jun; only reports.

Great Egret: Hoosic Ri RENS 14-18 Jul; Crescent SCHE 1 Aug; Hillsdale COLU 2 Aug; 2 Dyke Ave Pd 3 Aug; 2 Gansevoort SARA 5 Aug; MR at Atomic Knolls 10 Aug; COH 11 Aug; max 10 MR 11 Aug; 2 Exit 8A SARA 13 Aug; max 7 MR at COH 14-25 Aug; numerous.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: pr West Hebron WASH 9 Jul; max 5 juv COH 3 Aug.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Osprey: possibly unmated territorial ad Hoosic Ri 21-26 Jun; HR Castleton RENS 10 Aug; 9 Atlas blocks, although breeding unlikely.

N. Harrier: Florida MONT 24 Jun; Gansevoort SARA 22 Jul; carrying rabbit MONT 11 Aug; 11 additional Atlas blocks.

N. Goshawk: JON 2 Jun; L Luzerne WARR 26 Jun; Stratford FULT 16 Jul; Delmar ALBA 4 Aug; Tsatsawassa L RENS 20 Aug.

Red-shouldered Hawk: EPH 3 Jun; 2 Milton SARA 11 Jun; Germantown COLU 13 Jun; Hoags Corners RENS 23 Jun.

Merlin: reported in 3 Atlas blocks: T Bleeker FULT, T Northampton FULT, T Day SARA.

Peregrine Falcon: Schodack I SP RENS 29 Jun; Brookview RENS 6 Jul.

Virginia Rail: Hebron WASH 13 Jun; feeding yg Tsatsawassa L RENS 13 Jun; OPP 17 Jun.

Sora: reported in 3 Atlas blocks: T Sharon SCHO, Vails Mills FULT, T Milton SARA; only reports.

Com. Moorhen: reported in 4 WASH Atlas blocks: T Greenwich, T Fort Ann, T Dresden, T Putnam; only reports.

Greater Yellowlegs: COH 22-26 Jul.

Lesser Yellowlegs: max 12 COH 22-26 Jul.

Solitary Sandpiper: 2 GREE 3 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: W Galway SARA 1 Jun; max 4 Cocksackie Flats GREE 1 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: 3 COH 24-26 Jul; max 12 COH 31 Jul; COH 11 Aug.

Least Sandpiper: HR Mechanicville SARA 17 Jul; 14 COH 22 Jul; max 30 COH 11 Aug.

Pectoral Sandpiper: 3 COH 24-26 Jul; COH 29 Aug.

Dunlin: 2 Saratoga Sod Farm SARA 3 Jun.

Stilt Sandpiper: 4 COH 11 Aug.

Short-billed Dowitcher: COH 24 Jul.

Wilson's Snipe: OPP 12-13 Jul.

LAUGHING GULL: imm COH 25 Aug (RG).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: COH 22 Jul-2 Aug.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 80 COH 29 Aug.

PIGEONS – WOODPECKERS

Great Horned Owl: carrying a skunk Fonda MONT 5 Aug.

Com. Nighthawk: 2 QUE 4 Jun; max 25 Guilderland ALBA 30 Aug; generally low numbers.

Whip-poor-will: 11 Atlas blocks.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: Ann Lee Pd 13 Aug; 7 Atlas blocks.

Alder Flycatcher: max 6 EPH 3 Jun.

Fish Crow: max 30 New Baltimore GREE 20 Jul.

Horned Lark: feeding yg Saratoga Co Airport 16-19 Jun; max 5 Saratoga Co Airport 19 Jun.

Purple Martin: Hebron WASH 13 Jun, outside known colonies.

BOREAL CHICKADEE: pr Crane Mt WARR 20 Jun (CS).

Carolina Wren: scarce following winter population crash.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Catskills GREE 17 Jul (SC).

Bicknell's Thrush: singing Hunter Mt GREE Jun thru; feeding yg there 30 Jun.

Swainson's Thrush: singing Spring L RENS 23 Jun.

WARBLERS

Golden-winged Warbler: 7 Atlas blocks.

"Brewster's" Warbler: T Dresden WASH.

Nashville Warbler: 2 JOH 3 Jun; Milton SARA 13 Jun; Grafton Lakes SP RENS; Vischer Ferry SARA 28 Aug.

Pine Warbler: T Mayfield FULT 4 Jul.

Blackpoll Warbler: JOH 2 Jun; QUE 19 Jun.

Cerulean Warbler: North Blenheim SCHO, only report.

Worm-eating Warbler: 2 Copake COLU 12 Jun; Hillsdale COLU 3-4 Jul.

N. Waterthrush: Livingston COLU 6 Jun; L Luzerne WARR 11 Jul.

Mourning Warbler: EPH 3 Jun-2 Jul; T Mayfield FULT 4 Jul; Stratford FULT 5 Jul; OPP 8-13 Jul.

Hooded Warbler: Copake COLU 12 Jun; Coeymans ALBA 16 Jun.

Wilson's Warbler: Claverack COLU 29 Aug; Hillsdale COLU 30 Aug.

Canada Warbler: 2 JOH 2 Jun; 2 EPH 3 Jun; OPP 17 Jun; QUE 19 Jun; Stratford FULT 5 Jul.

TANAGERS – WEAVERS

Vesper Sparrow: 3 Saratoga Cemetery 3 Jun-31 Jul, breeding; max 5 EPH 2 Jul.

Grasshopper Sparrow: Saratoga Co Airport 13-19 Jun; 2 St Johnsville MONT 13-21 Jul; 5 additional Atlas blocks.

Bobolink: max 10 EPH 15 Jun.

E. Meadowlark: 2 St Johnsville MONT 24 Jun; most reports only of singles.

Orchard Oriole: S Schodack RENS 9 Jun.

Purple Finch: continuing recovery, outbreak of conjunctivitis (RY).

Pine Siskin: max 3 JL 6 Jun; Gansevoort SARA 21-23 Jun; QUE 17 Jul; OPP 23 Jul.

Evening Grosbeak: breeding JL Jun, some with conjunctivitis; max 6 L Luzerne WARR 9 Jul.

House Sparrow: observed attacking ad Tree Swallow, killing 5 of its nestlings ALBA Jun.