

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON – SPRING 2007

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As is often the case, weather was widely regarded as a potent factor affecting bird life during early spring. Cold, rainy, and snowy weather during this period caused considerable mortality among Tree Swallows, Eastern Bluebirds, and Eastern Phoebe. Heavy snowfalls in March and April in some Regions forced birds to roadsides to forage, causing yet more mortality, but also providing a rare chance to count large numbers of early migrants, including 600+ Wilson's Snipe in in Region 5's Oswego County 7-9 April! Although mid April's inclement weather retarded the normal progression of spring migration in many areas, the powerful northeast storm of 15-16 April also contributed to some spectacularly early arrivals. Foremost among these were Long Island's first ever April records of **Sooty Tern** (2!), and a classic barrier beach fallout of buntings grosbeaks, tanagers, and others (Figure A, p. 240).

References to southeastern-breeding landbirds were far too many, and too widely distributed in space and time, to attribute solely to the chance effects of weather. In Region 1, Kentucky Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Yellow-throated Warbler made news, as did Worm-eating Warbler and Summer Tanager in Region 2, Prothonotary and Worm-eating warblers in Region 5, and Orchard Orioles in far northern Regions 6 & 7. Other southerners attracting attention in Region 7 included Black Vulture, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Blue-winged and Prairie warblers. Two **Anhingas** soaring over the Hudson River in Region 8 on 2 May were presumably even more shocking! Unusual reports of southern species from Region 9 included a **Mississippi Kite** over Doodletown, Rockland County, on 12 May, and Orange County's first documented record of Blue Grosbeak on 18 May. Even with some undocumented precedents, the latter record underscores how abruptly the occurrence of this and many other species diminishes away from the outer coast. Well represented in Region 10 were Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Summer Tanager, and Blue Grosbeak.

The continuing northward range expansion of the Black Vulture was evidenced by reports from Regions 1, 3, 5, and 7, the last representing Region 7's second and Clinton County's first record. Black Vultures also raised attention in Region 8, where six reports involving seven birds came from four

different counties, and in Region 10's Long Island, where the species is still a rare find. Finally, a probable new nesting site was found in Region 9, the species' stronghold in NYS.

The shorebird migration had a mid-continental flavor in many parts of the state. Bill Watson's Marbled Godwit on Ruddy Marsh was Region 1's second spring record, and four Willets on a farm pond in Potsdam were truly inland—i.e., not only far from New York's tidewater breeding populations, but also away from the Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence shore, where most of Region 6's records have occurred. Like all upstate Willets, these birds were almost certainly migrants of the western subspecies *inornatus*. Willie D'Anna's Stilt Sandpiper in Region 1 was unique in the state this spring, but there were multiple reports of American Golden-Plover (Regions 1, 2, 9, and 10) and Wilson's Phalarope (Regions 1, 2, and 10).

The frequency of vagrancy is usually lower during spring than fall migration, but the number of nominal spring vagrants is augmented when overwintering fall vagrants linger into March and beyond. In this category were at least one of Region 2's two **Harris's Sparrows** and a **Varied Thrush**, Region 3's venerable **Pacific Loon** and Eared Grebe, Region 9's **Slaty-backed Gull** and **Bullock's Oriole**, and Region 10's **Smith's Longspur** and **Western Tanager**.

More authentically vernal were the following records from Region 1: **Western Meadowlark**, **Black-headed Grosbeak**, and **Lark Bunting**. Region 2 hosted two Dickcissels (rare in spring), **Yellow-headed Blackbird**, and a first spring male **Bullock's Oriole**. Region 5's highlights included Eurasian Wigeon, Am. White Pelican, Great Cormorant, Laughing Gull, Little Gull, and Loggerhead Shrike, in addition to the southern warblers mentioned above. Region 7 recorded its third, and Clinton County its first, **Tufted Duck**. Region 7 also hosted a Eurasian Wigeon. A crisp male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** was one of Region 8's unusual finds. Among four reports of Greater White-fronted Goose from Region 10 was a very unusual pink-billed bird at Water Mill. Almost all Long Island birds are believed to derive from the Greenland populations. Region 10 also reported four "Richardson's" Cackling Geese, five Eurasian Wigeon, and five "**Eurasian**" **Green-winged Teal**. Other vagrants there included a **White-faced Ibis**, a nominate **Mew Gull**, a potential first Long Island **Slaty-backed Gull**, and a **Painted Bunting**. A *Passerina* bunting at Fire Island on 16 April showed bold wingbars recalling **Lazuli Bunting**, and probably descended at least in part from that species. Sadly, this bird did not allow prolonged study, but a few photos were obtained before the bird vanished, and these may be viewed at <http://picasaweb.google.com/tixbirdz/>.

A Ruddy Shelduck among migrating waterfowl on 17 March in Region 1 raised intriguing questions. The individual in question evidently showed no indications of captive origins, and the possibility of natural occurrence should not be dismissed uncritically. Indeed, the species has wandered to Iceland and Greenland (ABA Checklist Committee. 2004. 2003 Annual Report. *Birding* 36: 38-41)—and very likely to North America as well (Allard, K., McKay, K. and McKinnon, L. 2001. Sighting of Ruddy Shelducks at East Bay, Southampton

Island, Nunavut. *Birders Journal* 10: 86-89). The ABA Checklist Committee's decision to designate the latter record (a flock of six in Nunavut!) as "origin hypothetical" strains this writer's credulity, but ultimately, the ornithological record ought to preserve facts, not opinions. Dennis Russell and Mike Morgante are to be commended for keeping records like this under scrutiny.

BIRD OF THE SEASON

Among the many memorable birds from spring 2007, some would seem to be disqualified from the BOTS award because of the grim circumstances surrounding their occurrence. Among these are the astonishing April records of Sooty Tern, which sadly succumbed to the storm on which they arrived. Likewise, several other examples of remarkable fallouts and local concentrations of birds bespoke distress for the birds involved. Others, such as the Anhinga and the Mississippi Kite delighted their observers in a much less conflicted fashion—but these birds were seen by only a few people. After due consideration, I think that the nominate Mew Gull found by Angus Wilson in Brooklyn on 8 April stands out as the most exceptional rarity that was seen by many observers. Only the second documented record from Long Island, this second winter individual was studied and photographed by many observers over a two day period (Figure B, p. 241).

