

EARLY ARRIVAL OF RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) IN SOUTHEASTERN NEW YORK DURING SUMMER 2007

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Abstract—In June and early July of 2007 there were a number of sightings of Red-breasted Nuthatch on Long Island and in New York City. These observations are noteworthy for the early dates of arrival and their occurrence at locations that do not have regularly breeding Red-breasted Nuthatches. The early arrival of Red-breasted Nuthatches in Region 10 is often a harbinger of a fall coastal movement.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch is a generally distributed breeder over much of New York State, its presence dependent on the existence of mature conifer forests. The species' breeding stronghold is the Adirondacks, where it favors spruce or woods featuring a mix of coniferous and deciduous species (Andrle & Carroll, 1988). An irruptive species, the Red-breasted Nuthatch moves south in response to failure of the conifer seed crop. Fall irruptions are typically followed by good spring flights, with breeding on Long Island often following a good spring flight. Away from favored breeding areas, the species is considered rare on LI in summer, with early arrival dates of July to mid-August (Levine 1998). Yunick (1988), in a study of Christmas Bird Counts over the period 1960-1986, found the species' irruptive behavior on Long Island to occur in two year cycles that were less well marked in other areas of the state.

On Long Island, the species has bred in mature Pitch Pine (*Pinus rigida*) in pine barrens and wetland areas of Suffolk County, White Pine (*Pinus strobus*) plantings in both Nassau and Suffolk Counties, mixed stands of conifers planted on formerly private estates that are now publicly owned parks and preserves, and planted Japanese Black Pine (*Pinus thunbergi*) on the barrier beaches. The breeding status of Red-breasted Nuthatch on Long Island has changed as the species' upstate range has expanded. Griscom (1923) stated that in southeastern New York State the bird was a fall and spring migrant and a rare winter visitant; he knew of no breeding records. By the 1964 publication of John Bull's *Birds of the New York Area*, the species was listed as a rare to fairly common winter visitant, especially on the coast. One possible breeding record from Orient, Suffolk County was not accepted.

During the 1980-1985 NYS Breeding Bird Atlas there were twenty-eight possible, probable, or confirmed breeding records from Richmond (Staten Island), Nassau, and Suffolk Counties. The records were concentrated on the

north shore of Nassau and northwestern Suffolk Counties and the Central Suffolk Pine Barrens. The 2000-2005 NYS Breeding Bird Atlas recorded fifteen possible, probable, or confirmed breeding records of Red-breasted Nuthatch. The species was not recorded as a breeder from the north shore or north fork of Suffolk County, nor from the Jones Beach barrier island—locations that had potential breeding records from the earlier atlas.

During the winter of 2006-2007 Red-breasted Nuthatches were scarce on Long Island. Similarly, there were a small number of spring sightings. Table 1 lists Red-breasted Nuthatch observations recorded in Region 10 during June and July 2007. Note that based on Atlas 2000 data, most locations do not have recent breeding records of the species.

Table 1. Observations of Red-breasted Nuthatches in New York City and Long Island, Jun-Jul 2007.

Date	Location/County	#	Observer	Atlas 2000 Status
6/14/07	East Islip (Suffolk)	1	S. Mitra	No breeding records
6/23/07	Montauk (Suffolk)	1	J. Giunta	No breeding records
6/24/07	Great River (Suffolk)	4	K. Feustel	Probable breeder
6/30/07	Quogue (Suffolk)	1	S. Sime	Probable breeder
7/1/07	Napeague (Suffolk)	2	J. Osterlund	No breeding records
7/2/07	Staten Island (Richmond)	1	H. Fischer	No breeding records
7/6/07	Jones Beach West End	1	P. Lindsay	No breeding records
7/10/07	Jones Beach West End	1	P. Lindsay	No breeding records
7/10/07	Fort Tilden (Queens)	1	S. Mitra	No breeding records
7/11/07	Bronx Bot. Gard. (Bronx)	1	R. DeCandidio	No breeding records

The observation of four Red-breasted Nuthatches in Great River took place at Connetquot River State Park, where the writer made weekly trips to the park following roughly the same route each time. On no previous trips up until 24 Jun were Red-breasted Nuthatches seen or heard in the Park. Given the vocal nature of the species, it is unlikely they were missed, making it probable that the birds were recent arrivals.

Early arrival dates for Red-breasted Nuthatches this season were also noted in Bucks County, PA, where Mirabella (electronic communication) noted three or four observations of the species dating back to 18 Jun. In New Jersey, the species was observed at Cape May on 18 Jun and 8 Jul (Cape May RBA, 6/18/07).

Since the June and July observations detailed above, Red-breasted Nuthatches have continued to be observed in areas where they are not known to breed, with sightings at Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, Queens Co. (two on 8/14/07), Fort Tilden, Queens Co. (two on 8/12/07), Central Park, New York Co. (one on 8/12/07), again at JBWR (four on 9/2/07), with one at West End,

Jones Beach the same day. The mid and late-summer arrival of Red-breasted Nuthatch in Region 10 has often been an indication of a subsequent fall movement. Based on recent early summer observations of this species, the fall of 2007 should be no exception to this pattern.

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