

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

Summer was very dry and slightly warmer than normal. Watertown received 6.3" of precipitation for the period, which is 5.5" below normal. All three months were drier than average, with the monthly rainfall deficit ranging from 0.5" in July to 1.9" August. June's average temperature of 68.3°F was 3° warmer than normal, and July's temperature of 69.2° was 1° cooler than usual. I did not receive official August temperature data for Watertown, but data from other parts of the Region indicate an average temperature that was less than 1° degree above normal.

The lack of precipitation during the summer, combined with a very dry May, resulted in low water levels throughout Region 6. By mid-August many ponds were nearly or completely dry, and extensive shoreline was exposed along Lake Ontario and many rivers. Low water apparently allowed ducks, loons, grebes, and other water birds to bring young off relatively early and in good numbers and also provided abundant habitat for migrating shorebirds, which were reported in higher numbers than during many recent years.

Waterfowl observations from Upper and Lower Lakes reflect the apparent benefits the dry summer had for nesting. The first Common Loon chicks appeared on Lower Lake on 12 June, nearly a month earlier than in 2006, when summer rains flooded many nests. Ring-necked Duck broods were noted on Lower Lake throughout the summer, with up to eight young broods seen on a single visit and an estimated 15 for the season. Pied-billed Grebe productivity also was high, with more than 25 nests producing two to four young each, and by the end of the summer more than 100 grebes could be seen on Lower Lake.

On 11 June Tom Wheeler observed an apparent pair of **Red-necked Grebes performing a courtship display** on Lower Lake. This species has never been recorded nesting in New York but breeds in Ontario within a few hundred miles of the state. Unfortunately, the pair was not seen after 12 June and was presumed to have moved on. Will Raup and several other visiting birders reported a Red-necked Grebe from the same location on 8 July, but the plumage they described seemed to indicate that this bird was not one of the pair reported earlier. What exactly was going on with Red-necked Grebes at this location remains unclear. Snow Goose reports from Lowville in June and Theresa in July were also very unusual.

As many as 110 Great Egrets occupied a roost in Stockholm during August. This number, first reported by Robert Scranton and subsequently confirmed by several others, is more than double the previously reported high count for Region 6. During late July Gerry Smith watched a distant *Plegadis ibis* fly up the St. Lawrence River in Cape Vincent, presumably a Glossy but too distant for specific identification. Satellite transmitter data indicated that the wayward **Whooping Crane** from the eastern introduction remained in remote areas of the

Tug Hill through the summer, although I received no reports that anybody actually saw this bird during the summer period.

Merlins continue to increase, with new nesting locations reported from residential neighborhoods in Watertown and Canton. Several observers reported seeing many more Merlins than they had in previous years, and this species is now regular in summer throughout the Region. Other notable raptor observations included adult Northern Goshawks and Red-shouldered Hawks with young on Fort Drum.

The increase in shorebird reports did not include any particularly large concentrations or unusual species. Most shorebird reports came from the Lake Ontario shoreline, where low water provided extensive habitat for feeding. It is not clear whether the larger number of reports reflects larger numbers of shorebirds using the Lake Ontario shoreline or greater observer effort because local birders figured that low water levels would translate into more shorebirds and thus spent more time looking for shorebirds. For the second year in a row the Caspian Tern nest count at Little Galloo Island was lower than the previous year after nearly 20 years of continuous increases. The botulism outbreak that first hit eastern Lake Ontario in 2006 was no doubt responsible, and by the end of August another 271 Caspian Tern carcasses had been collected by the DEC. Common Terns nested along the St. Lawrence River in slightly lower numbers than in 2006, but had modestly higher productivity, due in large part to Lee Harper's efforts to improve the quality of nesting habitat along the river.

A large movement of Common Nighthawks occurred on the evenings of 21 to 24 August, with only a few scattered nighthawks reported afterward. The largest number reported was on 21 August, when 112 were counted in several groups in eastern Jefferson and southwestern St. Lawrence Counties. Ironically, on that same date at Fort Drum a flightless juvenile nighthawk was observed with an adult performing a distraction display. Nick Leone counted at least 25 Whip-poor-wills on a survey in Cape Vincent, which along with similar numbers reported in May from Chaumont and Fort Drum, illustrate the importance of Region 6 to the state's Whip-poor-Will population.

The health of the Region's grassland bird populations continues to be a concern. Although Upland Sandpipers and Henslow's Sparrows were reported in numbers comparable to the prior two years, both species are far less abundant than they were just five or six years ago. Several observers reported the absence of Upland Sandpipers in fields where they had been reliable previously; for instance I saw no Upland Sandpipers in a field in Leray where I had seen them every year since 1996. I received no reports of Henslow's Sparrows away from traditional locations at Fort Drum and near Perch River WMA. Sedge Wren numbers were typical for recent years, with reports from Fort Drum, Upper and Lower Lakes, and South Sandy Creek. A **Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow** was heard singing on Fort Drum on 1 June, but could not be relocated and was presumed to be passing through.

Excluding the Whooping Crane, I received reports of 194 species for the summer reporting period. Highlights not previously mentioned include adult male Orchard Orioles in Adams and at Fort Drum, lingering Pine Siskins and

Red Crossbills in the Adirondacks, and nesting Rusty Blackbirds near Wanakena. On the negative side was the continuing botulism outbreak on Lake Ontario, and to some the disappointment in not seeing the Red-necked Grebes at Upper and Lower Lakes stick around to nest (or at least not documenting nesting if they did in fact remain for the summer).

CONTRIBUTORS

Marilyn Badger, Jeff Bolsinger, Dick & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Bernie Carr, Sheila Cerwonka, Julie Covey, Lee Harper, Mike Jeziorski, Kathleen Killeen, Nick Leone, Jerry & Judi LeTendre, Irene Mazzocchi, Bob McGuire, Genie & Thomas McKay, David Prosser, Bill Purcell, Will Raup, Chris Reidy, Robert Scranton, Gerry Smith, Eve Sweatman, Andrew VanNorstrand, Tom & Eileen Wheeler.

ABBREVIATIONS

CV – Cape Vincent; ED – El Dorado Shores Preserve, Ellisburg; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; FM – Fox Marsh, Colton; HB – Hitchen's Bog, Piercefield; LC – Limerick Cedars; LGI – Little Galloo Island; MM – Massawepie Mire, Piercefield and Colton; PRWMA—Perch River WMA; – PtPen – Pt. Peninsula; SLR – St. Lawrence River; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, Canton.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: 8 Lowville 23 Jun (ph!); Theresa 3 Jul.

Trumpeter Swan: ad with 6 y PRWMA 26 Jul; 2 Brookside Cemetery Watertown thru.

Am. Wigeon: max 8 ULLWMA 12 Jun, no indication of breeding.

Blue-winged Teal: max 20 ED 31 Aug.

Ring-necked Duck: max 85 including 8 broods ULLWMA 10 Aug, where at least 7 other broods seen Jun & Jul.

Com. Merganser: ad w y Potsdam 27 Jun; max 28 PtPen 31 Aug.

Com. Loon: 2 chicks ULLWMA 12 Jun, earliest report of young.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 79 ULLWMA 10 Aug, where 25-28 nests on Lower Lake.

Red-necked Grebe: pair performing courtship display 11 Jun ULLWMA (TW), pair last seen 12 Jun (T&EW); individual in apparent non-breeding plumage 8 Jul (WR).

Am. Bittern: max 6 ULLWMA 10 Aug.

Least Bittern: max 3 ULLWMA 24 Jun.

Great Egret: max 110 Stockholm 13 Aug thru (RS), high.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: 15-21 per night flying over LC thru.

340

PLEGADIS IBIS: 1 CV flying up SLR late Jul (GS!).

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Red-shouldered Hawk: ad fy FD 26 Jun.

N. Goshawk: ad w y FD 23 Jun.

Merlin: 2 nests in residential neighborhoods Watertown and 1 Canton; nest Wanakena July; numerous reports, increasing.

Virginia Rail: max 9 ULLWMA 24 Jun.

WHOOPIING CRANE: Tug Hill thru, "lost" bird from eastern introduction.

Black-bellied Plover: max 10 ED 23 Aug.

Semipalmated Plover: max 8 ED 23 Aug.

Greater Yellowlegs: max 3 ED 31 Aug.

Lesser Yellowlegs: max 27 ED 31 Aug.

Solitary Sandpiper: max 6 FD 28 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: Brownville 2 Jun; Champion 4 Jun; 2 CV Jun; 2 Chaumont 6 Jul; max 4 FD 19 Jul; decreasing.

Sanderling: max 11 ED 31 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: max 51 ED 31 Aug.

Least Sandpiper: max 45 ED 23 Aug.

White-rumped Sandpiper: max 2 ED 30 Aug.

The Kingbird 2007 December; 57(4)

Pectoral Sandpiper: ED 29 Aug, only report.

Dunlin: ED 29 Aug, only report.

Short-billed Dowitcher: ED 23 Aug, only report.

Caspian Tern: 1580 nests LGI 6 Jun; DEC recovered 271 carcasses L Ontario thru 31 Aug, Type E botulism presumed.

Com. Tern: 671 nests SLR (79 fewer than 2006) produced 874 chicks (100 more than 2006) (LH).

Black Tern: 56 ULLWMA 24 Jun; 53 PRWMA 11 Jul.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Black-billed Cuckoo: max 6 FD 10 Jun, where numbers as before tent caterpillar outbreak.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: max 2 FD 10, 12 Jun.

N. Saw-whet Owl: 2 ULLWMA 2 Jun.

Com. Nighthawk: ad w y FD 21 Aug; 112 Antwerp, Gouverneur, & Dekalb 21 Aug; 44 Gouverneur & Dekalb 22 Aug; 54 West Carthage 24 Aug.

Whip-poor-will: 25-27 on CV survey route mid-Jun; last calling LC 29 Aug.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 5 pr FD Jun & July.

Black-backed Woodpecker: ad fy Leonard Pd trail Colton 22 Jul.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: reports FM, HB, and Wanakena.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: migrants FD 1-3 Jun; several reports MM Jun & Jul.

Philadelphia Vireo: MM several dates Jun, only reports.

Horned Lark: max 20 juv FD 23 Jul.

Carolina Wren: CV 21 Jun, only report.

Sedge Wren: 2 m FD early June increased to 12 by 29 Jun; ULLWMA thru 13 Jul; S. Sandy Creek 10 Jun (BC).

WARBLERS

Blue-winged Warbler: max 4 singing m FD 12 Jun.

Golden-winged Warbler: max 6 singing m FD 10 Jun.

"Brewster's" Warbler: 8 singing m FD Jun, increasing.

Chestnut-sided Warbler: ad fy 24 Aug, late.

Prairie Warbler: Champion 5 Jun CR, new location; max 6 FD 6 Jun.

"Yellow" Palm Warbler: max 40+ MM several dates Jun; other reports HB, FM, & Sabattis Bog.

Cerulean Warbler: different locations FD 10, 12, 18 Jun; 4 m Dekalb several dates Jun.

Canada Warbler: max 18 singing m FD 21 Jun.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: 14 singing m FD 7 Jun; max 19 singing m different area FD 10 Jul.

Vesper Sparrow: 3 Parishville 1 Jul; max 25 FD 23 Aug.

Grasshopper Sparrow: Champion 5 Jun.

Henslow's Sparrow: 7 m FD Jun & Jul, where last heard 14 Aug; 3 Dog Hill Road Orleans Jun.

NELSON'S SHARP-TAILED

SPARROW: singing m FD 1 Jun (JB; NYSARC).

Rusty Blackbird: 2 Janack's Landing trail Wanakena 29 Jul (BC), only report.

Orchard Oriole: Adams 4 Jun (IM); FD 13 Jun (JB).

Red Crossbill: 4 MM 10 Jun; FD 24 Jul.

Pine Siskin: MM 10 Jun, only report.

EXOTICS

Com. Shelduck: Horse Island 8 Aug.

===