

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

September was warm and dry, October was very warm and wet, and both temperature and precipitation were near normal during November. The warmest day of the season was 7 September, with the temperature reaching 94°F in Gouverneur (weather data for Watertown were incomplete). The mean temperature for September was 74.9°F, which is 3.5° above normal, and the warm weather continued through October, with a mean temperature of 64.3°, 6.6° above normal. November's mean of 43.2° was 1° below normal. The dry conditions that persisted through the summer continued into September, as the 2.5" of rain that fell in the month was 1.7" below normal. The rest of the season was modestly wetter than normal, with October and November receiving 4.7" and 3.9" of precipitation, respectively, which adds up to 1.6" more than normal for the two months combined. The first frost of the year in many lowland areas was on 23 October, and light snow and freezing rain fell on several days during the latter half of November.

Waterfowl diversity was reasonably high, but no rarities were reported. I received very few reports of Snow Goose or Brant, but Tundra Swans were present in good numbers along the Lake Ontario shoreline. Numbers of American Wigeon and American Coots were higher than have been reported in the Region during any fall since 1998, with the two species conspicuous at Upper and Lower Lakes and Wilson Hill throughout October and November. Typical concentrations of Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and Greater Scaup were noted from traditional fall staging areas. Ring-necked Duck at Upper and Lower Lakes exhibited two peaks in abundance of around 900 individuals, in early and late October, with many of the early individuals apparently departing mid-month; this compares with last year when numbers built steadily all month to a late October high of 2000 birds. Scoters were well reported, with all three species occurring on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Pied-billed Grebe was especially abundant at Upper and Lower Lakes, with more than 150 present in late September and early October.

The Type E Botulism outbreak continues to kill large numbers of waterfowl and waterbirds in eastern Lake Ontario. DEC personnel conducting transects along the Jefferson County shoreline collected 311 carcasses between 10 October and 11 November, of which two species predominated: Long-tailed Duck accounted for 40.8% and Common Loon 31.8% of the carcasses collected. Red-necked Grebe, the third most numerous species in the sample, accounted for 7.4% of carcasses collected, with 11 other species making up the remainder of the sample. These surveys cover a tiny fraction of the total shoreline in Region 6, and the total number of birds dying during this outbreak must be in the tens of thousands.

The raptor migration through Jefferson County was well described, thanks in part to surveys conducted by Gerry Smith and Tom Carrolan to document the potential impact of wind power development in the northern part of the county. On 16 October Tom Carrolan observed what he referred to as a “classic cul-de-sac flight” on Point Peninsula, where birds congregated at the southern tip of the peninsula and reversed direction to avoid flying over water. During two hours he counted 226 Turkey Vulture, 8 Northern Harrier, 4 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 4 Cooper’s Hawk, 4 Red-shouldered Hawk, 64 Red-tailed Hawk, and 1 Merlin. More general highlights from the raptor migration included 3 Golden Eagle, 11 Merlin, and 3 Peregrine Falcon. Rough-legged Hawk arrived 29 October, which is relatively late but within the normal arrival window. Numbers of Rough-legged and Red-tailed hawks present by late November were much lower than during the same period in 2006. Several observers suggested that small mammal populations in the area crashed during the late summer or fall, providing one potential reason for the lower buteo numbers this year.

The Great Egret roost at Winthrop Swamp in Stockholm, first reported by Robert Scranton in August, swelled to 126 birds in mid-September and then gradually diminished over the subsequent month. Regionally high numbers of Great Egrets had been seen here in past years, but the numbers observed this fall were at least twice the highest previous total for Region 6. Up to a dozen Black-crowned Night-Herons were also present at this roost through the fall.

Low water levels along the Lake Ontario shoreline seem to have encouraged birders to spend more time looking at shorebirds than has been the case in recent years, and the total number of species reported was higher than during any fall since 1998. Numbers of individuals were generally modest, but several species that are infrequently reported in Region 6 were observed, including American Golden-Plover, Whimbrel, Baird’s Sandpiper, and Red Phalarope. Whether the increase in reports was a result of an actual increase in birds or from increased observer effort remains unclear, but I suspect a little of both. Eugene Nichols, an avid angler and casual birder, reported seeing many hundreds and probably more than 1000 shorebirds using islands and shoals exposed by low water off the Point Peninsula shoreline in early September; he was fishing by boat and did not have optics with which to identify these birds to species. These numbers dwarf anything reported in many years and suggest that much of the Region 6 shorebird migration occurs along island locations that birders virtually never visit.

A photo of a Snowy Owl reportedly taken in Lewis County during November appeared on local interest Internet sites, and if the date and location are accurate was the only Snowy Owl observed in the Region. On 25 November I saw a Barred Owl active during the middle of the day, perhaps indicative of a bird having trouble finding food. By the end of the reporting season small numbers of Short-eared Owl were present at traditional wintering areas in Cape Vincent, but Gerry Smith noted that unlike in past years, nearly all of the hayfields in this area were mowed late in the growing season or plowed, and roosting habitat was unusually scarce.

Red-headed Woodpecker was reported from Cape Vincent, one of the few remaining known nesting sites in the Region, and Robert Wehle State Park in Henderson, a relatively new park that has received little attention from birders since it was established in 2004. Thomas Brodie Johnson and several fellow birders visiting from the Ithaca area reported the woodpecker in the park, two Red Phalaropes flying over Lake Ontario from the park's bluffs, and a Parasitic Jaeger from a nearby location on Stony Point. Late Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were reported in Madrid and Watertown, the latter regularly coming to a feeder through November.

The passerine migration progressed relatively steadily through September and October, with several modest pulses but no especially large movements noted. The first Northern Shrike was reported on 15 October, and shrikes were present in good numbers by the end of November. Philadelphia Vireo was well reported, with 1-2 seen daily on Fort Drum and at Indian Creek Nature Center during the first two weeks of September. Tufted Titmouse seemed unusually conspicuous during late October and early November. As is often the case, few thrushes were observed, but those who listened for nocturnal migrants heard large numbers of thrushes passing overhead on several nights in late September.

The 24 species of warbler reported compares favorably with reports from past years. A **Yellow-breasted Chat** at Indian Creek Nature Center on 23 September was the first reported in Region 6 in several years and is very rare in St. Lawrence County. Another highlight was an Orange-crowned Warbler observed at the same location on 2 October. As usual for the fall season, I received very few reports of warblers from other observers, and suspect that few in Region 6 spend much time looking at fall songbirds.

It was another interesting year for finches and other irruptive passerines. An early Bohemian Waxwing seen on Fort Drum with a flock of Rusty Blackbirds 24 October presaged the eventual invasion of the Region by this species, and Bohemians were observed in a number of locations throughout November. Pine Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls were also widespread by the end of the reporting period, the grosbeaks in generally modest numbers but redpolls in flocks of up to 400. On 20 November at least one **Hoary Redpoll** was in a large flock of Commons on Fort Drum. During much of the fall Evening Grosbeaks seemed to be everywhere, but while still present in good numbers in late November, were mostly absent from valley locations. Purple Finches were ubiquitous in September and October, but virtually absent by November, and Pine Siskins and American Goldfinches likewise were scarce by the end of the reporting period. The departure of these finches and the absence of any crossbills was widely attributed to a poor cone crop.

A total of 210 species was reported during the fall, a higher total than usual for this Region thanks to relatively widespread coverage albeit by few observers. This species total and the improvement in coverage it reflects is the true highlight of the season. A number of species certainly passed through Region 6 without detection because, for instance, few observers devoted any time to watching Lake Ontario, but hopefully this fall's results are part of a trend toward more thorough coverage.

CONTRIBUTORS

Marilyn Badger, Jeff Bolsinger, Richard & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Bernie Carr, Tom Carrolan, Sheila Cerwonka, Joan Collins, Lee Harper, Thomas Brodie Johnson, Nick Leone, Jerry & Judi LeTendre, Robert & Ellie Long, Genie McKay, Jim Murray, Eugene Nichols, David Prosser, Robert Scranton, Michael Sheard, Eve Sweatman, Tom & Eileen Wheeler.

ABBREVIATIONS

BRB – Black River Bay; CV – Cape Vincent; ED – El Dorado Shores Preserve; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center, Canton; KC – Kelsey Creek, Watertown; Lpd – Leonard Pond trail, Colton; LPt – Leishman Point, Waddington; MM – Massawepie Mire, Piercefield and Colton; MP – Montario Point, Ellisburg; PilPt – Pillar Point; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; PtPen – Pt. Peninsula; RGWSP – Robert G. Wehle SP; SBSP – Southwick Beach SP; SLR – St. Lawrence River; StPt – Stony Point; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA; WBSP – Westcott Beach SP; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WS – Winthrop Swamp, Stockholm.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: arr Canton 14 Oct; max 300 Watertown 18 Nov; few reports.

Brant: max 40 SBSP 16 Nov; few reports.

Tundra Swan: max 76 PtPen 25 Nov.

Trumpeter Swan: 2 ad 3 y PRWMA 27 Sep.

Wood Duck: last 2 FD 8 Nov.

Gadwall: max 78 WHWMA 9 Nov.

Am. Wigeon: max 290 WHWMA 28 Oct.

Am. Black Duck: max 400 BRB 28 Nov.

Blue-winged Teal: max 61 ULLWMA 12 Oct; last 2 ULLWMA 28 Oct.

N. Shoveler: PRWMA 27 Sep; PtPen 22 Oct; only reports.

N. Pintail: max 11 ICNC 3 Nov.

Green-winged Teal: max 53 FD 8 Nov.

Canvasback: WHWMA 28 Oct, 4 Nov.

Redhead: max 560 WHWMA 28 Oct.

Ring-necked Duck: 8 broods ULLWMA 7 Sep; 880 ULLWMA 6 Oct; 975 ULLWMA 28 Oct; 720 WHWMA 4 Nov.

Greater Scaup: 7000-9000 distant scaup believed to be primarily this sp BRB 21-28 Nov.

Lesser Scaup: 4 ULLWMA 6 Oct.

Surf Scoter: 4 arr ED 5 Oct; max 10 LPt 4 Nov.

White-winged Scoter: arr StPt 16 Sep; 23 SLR Waddington 23 Oct; max 200 MP 12 Nov.

Black Scoter: max 15 MP 31 Oct; LPt 4 Nov.

Long-tailed Duck: arr ICNC 28 Oct; 127 carcasses collected L Ontario shore 10 Oct thru 11 Nov.

Bufflehead: 190 PtPen 12 Nov; max 200 PilPt 21 Nov.

Com. Goldeneye: arr SBSP 31 Oct; max 200 PilPt 21 Nov.

Hooded Merganser: max 312 WHWMA 18 Nov.

Com. Merganser: max 1000 Coles Creek SP 30 Nov.

Red-breasted Merganser: 16 arr ULLWMA 8 Oct; max 60 WBSP 12 Nov.

Red-throated Loon: MP 28 Nov, only report.

Com. Loon: max 12 Barnhart Island SLR 9 Nov; 99 carcasses collected L Ontario shoreline 10 Oct thru 11 Nov, Type E Botulism suspected.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 150+ ULLWMA 12 Oct.

Horned Grebe: max 11 PilPt 12 Nov.

Red-necked Grebe: StPt 16 Sep; Chaumont Bay 24 Nov; 23 carcasses collected L Ontario shore 10 Oct thru 11 Nov.

Am. Bittern: last ICNC 28 Sep.

Great Egret: max 126 WS 21 Sep, high count (RS); 6 still at WS roost 18 Oct.

Green Heron: last 2 ICNC 2 Oct.

The Kingbird 2008 March; 58 (1)

Black-crowned Night-Heron: max 12 WS 12 Sep.
Turkey Vulture: last PtPen 8 Nov.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Osprey: last ICNC 30 Sep.
N. Harrier: 15-20 per day CV thru early Nov; max 26 CV 15 Oct; virtually absent by late Nov.
N. Goshawk: ad Robert Moses SP 18 Nov; FD 20 Nov; flying over SLR Waddington 30 Nov.
Red-shouldered Hawk: max 4 PtPen 16 Oct; few reports.
Red-tailed Hawk: max 64 PtPen 16 Oct.
Rough-legged Hawk: arr FD 29 Oct; max 15 CV 18 Nov; immatures scarce.
Golden Eagle: ad Potsdam 18 Oct (JC); ad WHWMA 17 Nov (MS); imm Potsdam 20 Nov (JC).
Am. Kestrel: 25-35 per day CV thru mid Sep; scarce by Nov.
Merlin: 11 reports.
Peregrine Falcon: Gouverneur 26 Sep; FD 1 Oct; ULLWMA 12 Oct.
Com. Moorhen: last WHWMA 29 Sep.
Am. Coot: max 136 WHWMA 4 Nov.
Black-bellied Plover: max 12 ED 5 Oct.
Am. Golden-Plover: ICNC 30 Sep; ED 5 Oct.
Semipalmated Plover: max 2 ED 5 Oct.
Killdeer: max 52 ED 5 Oct; last Lpt 9 Nov.
Greater Yellowlegs: max 4 ED 12 Sep; last FD & PtPen 8 Nov.
Lesser Yellowlegs: max 11 ED 5 Sep.
Solitary Sandpiper: max 5 ICNC 7 Sep & FD 20 Sep; last ICNC 12 Oct.
Whimbrel: Sackets Harbor 3 Oct (GM, photo!).
Sanderling: max 90 ED 5 Oct.
Semipalmated Sandpiper: max 7 PilPt 18 Oct.
Least Sandpiper: max 7 ED 20 Sep.
Baird's Sandpiper: ED 5 Oct (JB).
Pectoral Sandpiper: max 4 ED 5 Oct.
Dunlin: max 8 PilPt 18 Oct.
Red Phalarope: 2 RGWSP 16 Sep (TBJ).
Parasitic Jaeger: StPt 16 Sep (TBJ).
Bonaparte's Gull: max 91 PtPen 25 Nov.
Caspian Tern: last ED 12 Sep.
Com. Tern: last ED 12 Sep.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Snowy Owl: photo in local media reputedly from Castorland 15 Nov, only report.
Barred Owl: 1 hunting mid-day Madrid 25 Nov.

Short-eared Owl: arr CV 10 Nov.
Com. Nighthawk: last Gouverneur 5 Sep.
Chimney Swift: last Ellisburg 8 Sep.
Ruby-throated Hummingbird: last ICNC 21 Sep.
Belted Kingfisher: scarce after 25 Oct.
Red-headed Woodpecker: 3 CV 1 Sep; imm RGWSP 16 Sep.
Red-bellied Woodpecker: Sandy Creek Valley N of Tug Hill, new location.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: KC feeder 16 Oct thru (RB); Madrid 18 Nov (JB).
Black-backed Woodpecker: MM 17 Sep; ad m S end Massawepie L 7 Oct; LPd 5 Nov.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

E. Wood-Pewee: ICNC 30 Sep.
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: RGWSP 16 Sep, only report.
Least Flycatcher: last FD 19 Sep.
E. Phoebe: last FD & KC 24 Oct.
Great Crested Flycatcher: last Canton 14 Sep.
N. Shrike: arr CV 15 Oct; 1-3 per day throughout Region Nov.
Yellow-throated Vireo: last FD 19 Sep.
Blue-headed Vireo: max and last 14 FD 10 Oct.
Warbling Vireo: last FD 19 Sep.
Philadelphia Vireo: max 2 ICNC 1 & 7 Sep; 1 each on 6 days FD 4 thru 13 Sep; 1 ICNC 9 Sep.
Red-eyed Vireo: last ICNC 12 Oct.
Horned Lark: 30 Hounsfield 28 Nov.
Tree Swallow: last 70 ULLWMA 12 Oct.
N. Rough-winged Swallow: last ICNC 1 Sep.
Barn Swallow: last ICNC 9 Sep.
Tufted Titmouse: reports from 6 locations where previously unreported JEFF and STLA 17 Oct - 12 Nov.
Carolina Wren: Potsdam 30 Oct.
House Wren: last FD 4 Oct.
Winter Wren: last ICNC 12 Oct.
Golden-crowned Kinglet: arr ICNC 23 Sep.
Ruby-crowned Kinglet: arr FD 13 Sep; max 112 FD 10 Oct; last FD 8 Nov.
E. Bluebird: max 33 FD 10 Sep; groups 4-10 still present throughout Region 30 Nov.
Veery: last ICNC 7 Sep.
Gray-cheeked Thrush: ICNC 21 Sep.
Swainson's Thrush: ICNC 7 Sep; FD 13 & 18 Sep, 3 Oct.
Hermit Thrush: last FD 24 Oct.
Gray Catbird: last KC 14 Oct.
Brown Thrasher: last ICNC 28 Sep.

Am. Pipit: arr ICNC 30 Sep; max 50+ Rutland 15 Oct; last FD 8 Nov.
Bohemian Waxwing: arr FD 24 Oct, early (JB); widespread reports of small flocks 8 Nov thru; max 180+ Potsdam 24 Nov (JC).
Cedar Waxwing: max 140 FD 26 Nov.

WARBLERS

Golden-winged Warbler: ICNC 1, 7 Sep.
Tennessee Warbler: last ICNC 28 Sep.
Orange-crowned Warbler: ICNC 2 Oct (JB).
Nashville Warbler: last ICNC 28 Sep.
N. Parula: last ICNC 28 Sep.
Yellow Warbler: last ICNC 7 Sep.
Chestnut-sided Warbler: last ICNC & KC 27 Sep.
Magnolia Warbler: last ED 5 Oct.
Cape May Warbler: KC 27 Sep, only report.
Black-throated Blue Warbler: last ED 5 Oct.
Yellow-rumped Warbler: max 117 FD 10 Oct; last ICNC 3 Nov.
Black-throated Green Warbler: last KC 12 Oct.
Blackburnian Warbler: last KC 27 Sep.
Pine Warbler: last FD 4 Oct.
Prairie Warbler: FD 27 Sep, only report.
“Western” Palm Warbler: max 19 FD 13 Sep; 18 FD 24 Sep; last FD 10 Oct.
“Yellow” Palm Warbler: “abundant” MM 29 Sep; 2 S end Massawepie L 7 Oct.
Bay-breasted Warbler: last FD 17 Oct, late.
Blackpoll Warbler: last FD 4 Oct.
Black-and-white Warbler: last FD 12 Sep.
Am. Redstart: last FD 27 Sep.
Ovenbird: last ICNC 28 Sep.
N. Waterthrush: last CV & ICNC 1 Sep.
Com. Yellowthroat: last FD 10 Oct.

YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT (R6):
ICNC 23 Sep (JB).

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

Scarlet Tanager: last FD 12 Sep.
E. Towhee: last FD 17 Oct.
Am. Tree Sparrow: arr FD 24 Oct.
Chipping Sparrow: last KC 7 Nov.
Field Sparrow: last FD 17 Oct.
Vesper Sparrow: last FD nesting area 10 Oct; migrants elsewhere FD 24 Oct; Canton 28 Oct.
Savannah Sparrow: last FD 19 Nov.
Fox Sparrow: arr ICNC 14 Oct; last Canton 16 Nov.
Song Sparrow: scarce after 28 Oct.
Lincoln’s Sparrow: FD 4 Oct, only report.
White-throated Sparrow: heavy movements 28 Sep-2 Oct and 10-14 Oct; scarce after 3 Nov.
White-crowned Sparrow: arr Potsdam 25 Sep; max 75 FD 10 Oct; last FD 24 Oct.
Dark-eyed Junco: arr ICNC 21 Sep; 20 per day KC feeder 10 Oct thru 15 Nov.
Lapland Longspur: Canton 18 Nov.
Snow Bunting: arr FD 30 Oct.
N. Cardinal: ad fy KC feeder 13 Oct, late.
Rusty Blackbird: arr ICNC 21 Sep; max 250 KC 15 Oct; last 9 ULLWMA 25 Nov.
Pine Grosbeak: arr 2 Canton 4 Nov; scattered singles thru mid Nov; many reports of 4-11 late Nov.
Purple Finch: widespread 5-20 per day thru 19 Oct; scarce after 28 Oct.
Com. Redpoll: arr FD 2 Nov; max 650 FD 20 Nov.
HOARY REDPOLL (R6): ad m FD 20 Nov (JB).
Pine Siskin: arr LPd 17 Sep.
Evening Grosbeak: many reports throughout Region 14 Oct thru.