

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

FIRST SCOTT'S ORIOLE IN NEW YORK STATE

On 4 Dec 2007, at about 3:00 pm under overcast skies, I spotted a bird in Union Square Park, Manhattan, which I was unable to identify. I suspected that it was an icterid because it had a slender pointed bill, but I wasn't sure about the species. About an hour later, I was able to point out the bird to Lenore Swenson, who identified it as an oriole. In addition to having the bill of an icterid, it had two white wing bars, a yellow-green breast, and a dark brown hood flecked with yellow in contrast to a dark gray back. By a process of elimination we knew it wasn't a Baltimore Oriole so that left only Orchard Oriole, if range alone was considered. We knew that that was unlikely too because Orchard Orioles are not found here after August. Lenore tentatively identified the bird as an Orchard Oriole, probably an immature male. We weren't satisfied with that identification but didn't venture to speculate on other possibilities such as Scott's, Hooded, or Audubon's, which we dismissed as being too farfetched. Subsequently, on 22 Jan 2008, I again observed the same unknown oriole in Union Square Park and I asked Ardith Bondi to photograph the bird. On 23 Jan Ardith photographed it and then posted her photographs on her website and sent out a notice on the listserv NYSBIRDS-L. This bird, in addition to the field marks already noted,

also had a dark bib down its breast (which was not noticeable in December) and dark streaking or mottling on its back. The bird was identified by numerous observers as a first year male Scott's Oriole based on several field marks: its dark-hooded, yellow-bellied appearance; the mottled or streaky pattern on the back, which is present in Scott's but not in Orchard Oriole; and its relatively long and very straight bill. This appears to be the first sighting of a Scott's Oriole in New York State.

The Scott's Oriole was observed over the course of the next few weeks in Union Square Park feeding on the contents of holes made in *Viburnum* stalks by a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. It also was observed feeding on bread and bananas and other fruit, at times chasing away European Starlings and House Sparrows from this food. It also was observed to have several fights with a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker whom it routinely chased away from the sapsucker holes.

The Scott's Oriole stayed at Union Square through 22 Feb 2008 and was observed by many birders and others almost daily during that period (see Fig. C, p. 155). It may just be coincidence, but a short time before the Scott's Oriole disappeared from Union Square Park, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was no longer seen in the park. The next sighting of the Scott's Oriole was on 31 Mar 2008, in Tompkins Square Park. This is another small park in lower Manhattan less than one mile from Union Square Park. The last day I saw the Scott's Oriole was on 1 Apr, in Tompkins Square Park. On that day Ardith and I observed the bird and she photographed it. We both observed that between feeding on the contents of drillings made by a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, also on the stalks of a *Viburnum* bush, it flew up into a tree and sang several times. Its plumage looked similar to that in February, although if you study the photographs over time, you can see that the bib had become a more solid black color and extended a little further down the breast compared to the bib on the bird in February.

Scott's Oriole breeds in the southwestern United States and overwinters in Mexico. It has been described as prone to vagrancy both to the north and northeast of its usual range. Recently Scott's Oriole has been sighted in winter in Pennsylvania and Kentucky. In light of the these sightings, as well as the first sighting in New York State, it will be interesting to see if there are more occurrences of Scott's Oriole east of the Mississippi in winter.

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SIX GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GEESE AT LIDO BEACH, NASSAU COUNTY

On 23 Jan 2008 I discovered a flock of six Greater White-fronted Geese on a lawn at Camp Anchor, Lido Beach, Nassau County. I believe that this number is unprecedented in our area, and that the photos clearly show the ID as correct (Figure D, p. 156). Unfortunately, there are no photos with all of the birds together. They were not banded, and were very wary.

Through the magic of cell phones, Sam Jannazzo was able to get down to Camp Anchor in time to meet me and corroborate the sighting. We saw the geese fly over to the golf course at Lido Beach, where we followed. We both saw them on the ground twice and in flight twice at the golf course, before they flew off. I saw on the LIBirding website that the six geese were subsequently seen back at Camp Anchor on about 10 Feb 2008, but the observer's full name was not given. As far as I know, this was the only other sighting of these birds.

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NORTHERN SHRIKE PREYS ON DOWNY WOODPECKER

On 9 Dec 2008 while birding Dune Rd., along the ocean coast of central Suffolk County, I stopped to take a look at a flock of juncos and other songbirds flitting to-and-fro across the road. Here, I chanced upon an Orange-crowned Warbler. Waiting to photograph the warbler, I was distracted by a fluttering of wings in the pines a few feet away, followed by 30 seconds to a minute of spine-tingling shrieking and more fluttering of wings. I had no idea what was making the noise and at first considered two birds in a territorial dispute—but wrong time of year, surely?—and was just considering the possibility of a Sharp-shinned Hawk when the answer suddenly flew across the road in front of me: an immature Northern Shrike carrying a male Downy Woodpecker by the neck. The woodpecker was very much alive, still shrieking and frantically flapping its wings. Despite this difficult cargo, the shrike flew straight into the middle of a bush and deftly impaled the woodpecker on some thorns. It then set to work ripping the tissue away from the back of the head and neck. The woodpecker struggled but could do nothing; a bloodied thorn was pushed right through its neck. Only when the shrike had exposed its skull and apparently punctured it, did the Downy stop twitching. The shrike consumed the brains and then severed the head entirely from the body before starting work on the torso from the neck stump. It was remarkably oblivious to my presence just a few feet away, barely pausing in its work when I moved to get a better view and take some photos. All this time, Black-capped Chickadees, Yellow-rumped Warblers and even the Orange-crowned Warbler were vigorously scolding the shrike just inches away. Sadly, they were briefly joined by a female Downy Woodpecker. I quietly left the scene but returned about 40 minutes later. The shrike was teed up on the top of a nearby bush and the woodpecker carcass still hung in the same place, presumably to be finished off later. One gets used to seeing hawks or gulls catch and devour small birds but seeing a shrike do this with such professionalism reminds me why they are known as 'butcher-birds'!

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