

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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The summer of 2008 was slightly warmer and much wetter than average. Mean temperatures in Watertown of 68.6° F in June and 70.5° F in July were 3.3° and 0.3° above normal, respectively, but August's mean temperature of 67.2° was 1.4° below normal. Watertown received 4.2" of precipitation in June, 5.2" in July, and 6.4" in August for a seasonal total that was 5.1" above normal. Seasonal departures from normal were similar across the Region, but the localized nature of many storms resulted in different locations receiving the bulk of their rainfall at different times. For instance, in Watertown each successive month was wetter, but in Ogdensburg June and July were very wet, with 2.0" and 4.0" above normal, respectively, and the August total was 0.6" below normal. Variation in the timing and intensity of rainfall events across the Region suggests that birds were affected differently in different locations depending on when the heaviest precipitation occurred.

The wet weather appears to have affected birds in at least two ways. First, ground-nesting birds likely suffered lower nest success and higher mortality, as suggested by the relative paucity of reported broods and small brood sizes for dabbling ducks and grouse. Lee Harper reports that three Common Tern colonies on the St. Lawrence River suffered 25% mortality of chicks from single thunderstorm events in June, but that colonies elsewhere on the river had no

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storm-related mortalities. Second, high water levels left very little shoreline exposed along the Region's rivers, ponds, and lakes, and not surprisingly few shorebirds were reported. This year's precipitation differed dramatically from last summer when exceptionally dry conditions provided unusually abundant shorebird habitat and high nest success for at least some ground nesting birds.

There are now at least three nesting locations for Trumpeter Swan in the Region, although the newest pair in a Watertown cemetery pond apparently lost their brood during the summer. In contrast to the apparent situation for some species, the numbers of Ring-necked Duck and Pied-billed Grebe broods at Upper and Lower Lakes were comparable to recent years. An adult male Lesser Scaup continued on Lower Lake through late June and was consistently seen in an area where a pair had been observed several times in May. These observations, combined with a very distant view of a bird thought to be a female scaup in mid-June, suggested the possibility of local nesting, but breeding was not confirmed and no scaup were seen in July or August. A brood of Common Goldeneye off Picton Island in the Thousand Islands represented the second nesting record for Region 6, the first having come from the same location in 1996. The avian botulism outbreak continues to kill birds on Lake Ontario, but at least through the end of the summer mortality was substantially lower than during the previous two years. As of 5 August DEC personnel found 31 dead Caspian Terns on Little Galloo Island compared with 800 and 309 in 2006 and 2007, respectively. Surveys along the Lake Ontario shoreline found similarly reduced numbers of carcasses, suggesting that the severity of the outbreak is subsiding.

On 28 July Chris Reidy observed a **Black Vulture** soaring with several Turkey Vultures over Leray, which was the first sighting of this species in Region 6 in several years. Merlin sightings came from throughout the Region, with probable or confirmed nesting in forested areas of the Adirondacks and Tug Hill as well as towns in the St. Lawrence Valley. On 14 August a Peregrine Falcon was briefly seen flying over Lower Lake. Several observers felt that Northern Harrier numbers were lower than in recent years, and Red-tailed Hawk numbers also seemed low in northern Jefferson County. At least two of three Sandhill Cranes present in Ellisburg in May continued through mid-August. Charlotte Briant began seeing a pair of cranes near her house in June and witnessed apparent courtship dances on several occasions, but no evidence of successful reproduction was detected. Based on the locations where these cranes occurred in May and presumably June and where they spent the rest of the summer, there was some speculation that this pair attempted to nest in or near a hayfield that was mowed during June.

Following a year with relatively good shorebird diversity, this year's reports returned to the dismal numbers that have become the norm over the past decade. A few species accounted for the vast majority of reports, especially Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Solitary and Least sandpipers, and the usual breeding species. The only noteworthy migrants were a Whimbrel that Nick Leone found in Cape Vincent and a Ruddy Turnstone Gerry Smith saw along the St. Lawrence River. Several observers noted that they looked for shorebirds only

once or twice and were so discouraged by the lack of birds and available habitat that they gave up looking for the remainder of the season.

Most of the grassland bird highlights came from Fort Drum, and apparently few observers spent any time looking for grassland birds elsewhere. One exception was a family of Upland Sandpipers MaryBeth Warburton found in Lawrence, which was the season's only confirmed nesting. Highlights on Fort Drum included at least 17 singing male Henslow's Sparrows and 16 territorial Sedge Wrens. This number of Henslow's Sparrows represents an increase over recent years, perhaps because of habitat loss elsewhere in Jefferson County from development and changing agricultural practices, forcing birds into the few remaining patches of habitat. One of the largest of these is on Fort Drum. Sedge Wrens apparently had a successful year nesting on the installation, as fledglings were seen on 6 territories in July and August.

Field biologists from Cornell, NYSDEC, and Fort Drum conducted surveys in the St. Lawrence Valley and adjacent areas for winged warblers. On Fort Drum, the phenotypes of 152 territorial males were visually confirmed, yielding the following breakdown: 47% Golden-winged, 36% Blue-winged, 15% Brewster's or hybrids of generally similar appearance, and 2% Lawrence's. The three "Lawrence's" Warblers were the first ever documented on Fort Drum and, along with the decreasing proportion of Golden-winged Warblers—outnumbering Blue-wingeds approximately 5:1 in the mid-1990s and 3-1 by 2000—and increasing numbers of Blue-winged and Brewster's Warblers, illustrates the ongoing replacement of Golden-winged by Blue-wingeds. Blue-winged Warblers continue to be less abundant in the northern portions of Region 6 but are increasing. For instance, two Blue-winged Warblers occupied territories at Indian Creek Nature Center, where only Golden-wingeds had been found before 2008.

Clay-colored Sparrows continue to increase on Fort Drum, where an amazing one-day count of 42 singing males was tallied in late June. This species clearly is well established as a breeder in Region 6, and the scarcity of reports from elsewhere in the Region likely is the result of low observer effort, as abundant habitat seems to occur throughout much of Jefferson County and portions of St. Lawrence County.

White-winged Crossbills invaded the Region in July, with the largest numbers in the state coming from the Tug Hill and smaller numbers in the Adirondacks. Tom Magarian documented the invasion in the northern Tug Hill, where he first reported them in late July and saw upwards of 250 by 12 August. Small numbers of Red Crossbills were also noted, but I received only one Pine Siskin and two Evening Grosbeak reports.

Notable among passerines was a **Dickcissel** Gerry Smith found singing from a power line in Hammond in June. This was only the second well-documented Dickcissel report for Region 6, the first coming from June 1996, although at least two reports of fall migrants from the past ten years have failed to make it into *The Kingbird*. Several observers noted early fall migrants during the last two weeks in August, especially flycatchers and warblers on Fort Drum and the Tug Hill. Perhaps the most interesting of these early migrants was a Philadelphia

Vireo on Fort Drum 13 August, which is about a week earlier than is normal. On 26 August a flock of fall migrant warblers on Fort Drum contained 14 species, including one Cerulean Warbler, a species rarely reported as a migrant in Region 6.

For the season I received reports of 191 species, three fewer than for the previous summer. Perhaps the highlight of the season was the late summer influx of White-winged Crossbills, but other highlights were potential nesting Sandhill Cranes and confirmed Common Goldeneye breeding, as well as high numbers of Sedge Wrens and Clay-colored and Henslow's sparrows on Fort Drum. The apparent decline in botulism-induced mortality was also good news. On the negative side were the complete lack of Sora reports and a perceived decline in the numbers of Common Moorhens, the continued loss of grassland bird habitat belying the good numbers for Henslow's Sparrow and Sedge Wren, and a return to paltry shorebird numbers and diversity.

CONTRIBUTORS

Ginny Alfano, Marilyn Badger, Jessie Barry, Steven Benedict, Jeff Bolsinger, Charlotte Briant, Carol Cady, Bernie Carr, Benjamin Clock, Joan Collins, Vici & Stephen Diehl, Lee Harper, Carolyn Jacobs, Mike Jeziorski, Tom Magarian, Matthew Medler, William Munro, Nick Leone, Jerry & Judi LeTendre, Gary Lewandrowski, Irene Mazzocchi, David Prosser, Chris Reidy, Theresa Rush, Robert Scranton, Gerry Smith, MaryBeth Warburton.

ABBREVIATIONS

CB – Chaumont Barrens, T Lyme; CV – T Cape Vincent; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; FM – Fox Marsh, T Colton; FrRd – French Road, T Martinsburg; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton; LGI – Little Galloo Island; LPd – Leonard Pond trail, T Colton; LRUD – Low's Ridge-Upper Dam trail, T Colton; MM – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; OP – Oak Point, T Hammond; PilPt – Pillar Point, T Brownville; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; SB – Sevey Bog, T Colton; SLR – St. Lawrence River; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WS – Winthrop Swamp, T Stockholm.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Trumpeter Swan: pr with 6 y PRWMA; pr w 2 y Brookside Cemetery Watertown.

Am. Wigeon: PRWMA 22 Jun.

Am. Black Duck: max 6 ULLWMA 29 July.

Mallard: few broods reported.

Blue-winged Teal: max 5 ULLWMA 22 Aug.

N. Pintail: PRWMA 22 Jun.

Ring-necked Duck: broods of 3, 5, 7, 9, & 9 y ULLWMA 21 Jun, where at least 6 additional broods Jul & Aug.

Lesser Scaup: ad m ULLWMA thru 29 Jun.

Com. Goldeneye: ad w 10 y Pictou Is SLR 30 June, 2nd Regional nesting record (WM, photos!).

Ruffed Grouse: broods scarcer and smaller than usual.

Com. Loon: pr with 2 y ULLWMA 14 Jun, earliest reported chicks; max 12 Butterfield L Aug.
Pied-billed Grebe: max 59 ULLWMA 23 Aug.
AM. WHITE PELICAN: Cranberry L 18 Jun (VD & SD!).
Double-crested Cormorant: 2492 nests LGI 11 Jun.
Am. Bittern: 6-12 per day FD early Jun; nest with 2 y FD 16 Jul.
Least Bittern: 2 FD 23 Jun; Potsdam 27 Jun.
Great Egret: max 115 WS 20 Aug (RS).
Black-crowned Night-Heron: reports from PRWMA, ULLWMA, WS.
BLACK VULTURE: with 7 Turkey Vultures Leray 28 Jul (CR!).

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Osprey: FD nest w 2 y lost during late Jun storm when snag blew over; nest on communications tower Oswegatchie; several new nests CV.
Bald Eagle: pr fledged 2 juv ULLWMA.
N. Harrier: numbers lower than in recent years.
Sharp-shinned Hawk: nest ICNC.
Cooper's Hawk: nest ICNC less than 1 mile from Sharp-shinned Hawk nest.
N. Goshawk: different locations FD 21 Jun, 24 Jun, 19 Jul; Star Lake early Aug.
Red-shouldered Hawk: juv at nest FD 2 Jul.
Merlin: 2 pr Canton neighborhoods within 1 mile from site of nest that apparently failed in 2007; many reports from all areas.
Peregrine Falcon: ULLWMA 14 Aug.
Com. Moorhen: absent from at least five locations JEFF & STLA where annual to at least 2006.
Virginia Rail: max 2 ICNC 29 Jun.
Sora: no reports.
Sandhill Crane: 2 thru mid-Aug Ellisburg near where 3 present most of May (CB!).
Black-bellied Plover: 2 PilPt 19 Aug.
Semipalmated Plover: Pt. Salubrious 21 Jul.
Killdeer: max 75 CV late Aug.
Greater Yellowlegs: 1-3 per day CV 8 Jul thru.
Lesser Yellowlegs: 6-10 per day CV 8 Jul thru.
Solitary Sandpiper: arr ICNC 29 Jul.
Upland Sandpiper: 5 displaying ad FD Jun; 2 ad with 2 y Lawrence (MW).
Whimbrel: CV 19 Jul (NL).
Ruddy Turnstone: OP 2 Aug.
Semipalmated Sandpiper: max 5 OP 2 Aug.
Least Sandpiper: max 8 LGI 21 Jul.

Bonaparte's Gull: Sackett's Harbor 29 Jul.
Caspian Tern: 54 carcasses L Ontario shore thru 5 Aug, far fewer than previous two years.
Com. Tern: 656 nests SLR (NYS side) produced 1031 chicks (LH); three SLR colonies suffered 25% mortality of chicks from thunderstorms 19-20 Jun.
Black Tern: no reports away from large colonies at PRWMA & ULLWMA.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: max 4 FD 9 Jun; numbers still higher than before 2003-05 tent caterpillar outbreak.
Com. Nighthawk: breeding max 17 on 10-stop survey route FD 19 Jul; migration max 65 Philadelphia & Gouverneur 21 Aug.
Whip-poor-will: max 36 on 10-stop survey route FD 19 Jul; 23 on Limerick route.
Red-headed Woodpecker: 7 pr FD Jun & Jul, where 7 ad & 5 juv foraging together 19 Aug; 2 pr CV thru; Hammond 15 Jun.
Black-backed Woodpecker: ad fy LPd 19 Jul.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: migrant FD 13 Jun; FrRd 2 Aug; additional reports FM, Horseshoe L, LPd, LRUD, MM.
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: migrants FD 4 Jun & 21 Aug; FrRd 4 Aug.
Philadelphia Vireo: presumed migrant FD 13 Aug.
Gray Jay: max 5 MM 16 Aug.
Horned Lark: "good numbers" CV Jun.
Cliff Swallow: 8 nests in Hammond colony, good number for a site away from SLR.
Boreal Chickadee: ad feeding 4 y SB 10 Jul.
Carolina Wren: Watertown 16 Jul (NL); CV 7 Jul thru (JL & JL, NL).
Sedge Wren: 16 singing m FD Jul, where y found on 6 terr late Jul & early Aug.
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: max 2 pr FD 2 Jun.
N. Mockingbird: CV 12 Aug.

WARBLERS

Blue-winged Warbler: 55 singing males FD Jun; 2 singing m ICNC where none previously.
Golden-winged Warbler: 71 singing m FD Jun.
"Brewster's" Warbler: 23 singing m FD Jun.
"Lawrence's" Warbler: 3 singing m FD Jun.
Prairie Warbler: 12 singing m FD Jun; several reports Chaumont Barrens.
Palm Warbler: several pr fy MM 7 Jun; additional reports LRUD & SB.
Blackpoll Warbler: last spring migrant FD 6 Jun; first fall migrant Martinsburg 27 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: migrant FD 26 Aug;
rarely reported after Jul.

Canada Warbler: 3-10 per day FD thru.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: max **42** singing m FD
27 Jun, where at least **76** territories Jun;
increasing.

Vesper Sparrow: 12-20 per day FD thru.

Grasshopper Sparrow: 4-8 per day FD thru.

Henslow's Sparrow: 17 singing m FD Jun and
several more Jul, more than recent years; only

other reports Dog Hill Rd Orleans, Hall Rd
Leray.

Lincoln's Sparrow: juv Martinsburg 1 Aug;
many LRUD, MM, SB.

DICKCISSEL: singing m Hammond 25 Jun
(GS, JB, DP, DB, photos!), seen again 2 Aug
(GS).

Red Crossbill: 2 FrRd 30 Jul.

White-winged Crossbill: 7 FD 19 Jul; max
255 FrRd 12 Aug (TM); scattered singles and
small flocks S STLA Jul & Aug.

Pine Siskin: SB 10 Jul.

Evening Grosbeak: 4 Potsdam 17 Jul; Higley
Flow SP 30 Jul.