

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—FALL 2008

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THE WEATHER

September was generally mild statewide, with temperatures averaging near or somewhat above normal. Two tropical systems affected the state in early to mid September. Tropical Storm *Hanna* moved up the coast and passed New York City and Long Island on 6 September. The remnants of Hurricane *Ike* brought precipitation and high winds to western New York in the middle of the month. More details on the avian effects of these two systems are included below and in the Regional reports. Statewide, October averaged slightly colder than normal with nearly 50% more precipitation than average. For November, the temperature statewide was near normal but precipitation was somewhat lower than average.

WATERFOWL/WATERBIRDS

Waterfowl migration was considered normal to slow for the most part. One consistent theme across most Regions is the continued increase in reports of Cackling Goose. This species was reported from seven of the nine reporting Regions this period, with a remarkable high count of 73 from Hamlin Beach in Region 2. As noted in the Region 3 report, it's hard to know how much of the uptick in reports is due to increased observer knowledge and effort rather than a real increase in the number of birds. Greater White-fronted Geese were reported from Regions 2, 3, 7 and 10, and Ross's Geese were seen in Regions 3 and 7, with Region 3 setting a new Regional maximum of nine at Montezuma NWR on 24 October. A Ross's x Snow Goose hybrid was identified in Region 9; as birders have become more aware of this hybrid combination, possible Ross's Geese have been subject to heightened scrutiny. Barnacle Goose was found in two locations in Region 10. Ducks were highlighted by Eurasian Wigeon in Regions 3, 6, and 10; Barrow's Goldeneye in Regions 2 and 7; and King Eider in Regions 2, 9, and 10.

A second-hand report of a nesting attempt by Trumpeter Swan was reported in Region 1, as the species continues to increase its numbers in New York and the Northeast in general. An apparent Trumpeter x Tundra Swan hybrid was found in Region 2.

Red-throated Loon numbers were low in Region 2 and there were no peak movements noted at the Hamlin Beach lakewatch there. Region 3 recorded Pacific Loons at two locations on Cayuga Lake in November, possibly the same

bird, and perhaps the same individual that has been in the general area for the last several winters. The only Eared Grebes for the season were at the traditional Batavia location in Region 1, with up to three found there. Northern Gannets appeared upstate with one in Region 1 and four in Region 2; downstate, they appeared in western Long Island Sound at Rye in Region 9, and a nice count of 1,000 was tallied at Robert Moses State Park in Region 10. A Great Cormorant was inland in Region 2 at Hamlin Beach.

A few impressively rare seabirds were delivered to New York by two tropical systems this fall. In September, in the wake of Tropical Storm *Hanna* a Magnificent Frigatebird was found at Mecox Bay and tracked westward to Moriches Inlet by a number of birders keeping in contact via cell phone. A Bridled Tern was also found following *Hanna*, at Democrat Point in Region 10. Even more unusual was a Magnificent Frigatebird found on Cayuga Lake in Region 3 following the passage of the remnants of Hurricane *Ike* to the west. This provided the first record for the Cayuga Lake and the second inland record for the State. A number of observers were able to see the bird the day of its discovery but unfortunately it was found dead the next day under the tree in which it went to roost. The specimen was salvaged and preserved at the Cornell University Museum of Vertebrates. This individual was part of a widespread post-*Ike* incursion of Frigatebirds into the Great Lakes and eastward, with reports from Michigan, Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Lingering Cory's and Sooty Shearwaters were found into October in Region 10, and Audubon's Shearwater was found on a Hudson Canyon pelagic trip in September. More unusual were two inshore Northern Fulmars, one at Fire Island inlet and one found at Montauk Point among the hordes of late-season Laughing Gulls, which peaked at an estimated 10,000 birds in early November. Also found in this dynamic mix were a Pomarine Jaeger and a Franklin's Gull. Franklin's Gull was also found upstate, with two from Region 2, and Sabine's Gulls were in Regions 1, 2 and 7, the Region 1 bird an ultra-confiding individual at Squaw Island in Buffalo. Black-legged Kittiwakes were found coastally in Region 10 and inland in Regions 1 and 2, but were missed in Region 5 for the first time in over 40 years. Little Gulls were reported from Regions 1, 2, 5 and 7, and Black-headed Gulls were found in Regions 7 and 10. California Gulls were highlights in Region 1, where the species has been found 16 of the last 17 years, and in Region 3, where an adult was the first record for the Cayuga Lake basin. Laughing Gulls were inland in Regions 3 and 5. Tern highlights included an Arctic Tern and a late Common Tern from Region 2, and nice counts of Royal Tern and Roseate Tern in Region 10. Parasitic Jaegers were widely reported, from Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 10, although numbers were lower than normal along the traditional Lake Ontario strongholds. Pomarine Jaegers were found in Regions 2, 5, and 10.

Southern herons made a minor push upstate with Glossy Ibis in Regions 1 and 3 and Little Blue Heron in Region 3. Cattle Egret was only reported from Regions 9 and 10, where two lingered in Water Mill through the end of the season. Sandhill Cranes, generally less common in fall than in spring, were reported from four Regions, including a state record maximum of 44 found in

the Savannah Mucklands in Region 3. The Region 7 report includes a summary of the species' occurrence in the Region.

HAWKS AND OWLS

Golden Eagle was seemingly more widespread than usual, with numerous reports spread across six Regions. Osprey lingered into November in at least four Regions. Fall Black Vultures are very rare upstate, so reports from both Region 1 and Region 2 were notable. The individual raptor highlight was no doubt the Swallow-tailed Kite seen at Hook Mountain in Region 9, the third for Rockland County. Snowy Owls staged an impressive incursion into the state in the latter part of the reporting period. Reports were received from 8 of the 9 reporting Regions, with the best numbers in years in some locations.

SHOREBIRDS

Several Regions described unimpressive shorebirding for the season, but there were highlights scattered about nonetheless. The rarest shorebird reported statewide was a Curlew Sandpiper from Region 7. Other Regional highlights include two reports of Whimbrel from Region 1; both Red and Red-necked Phalarope from Regions 1 and 2; Red Knot upstate in Regions 2 and 5; and Western Sandpiper upstate in Region 2. Buff-breasted Sandpipers were reported from Regions 2, 5, and 10. American Golden-Plovers were reported from seven Regions, with a high count of 122 in Region 2. On a negative note, Hudsonian Godwit was unreported statewide during the season; as noted in the Region 10 report, even the passage of Tropical Storm *Hanna* failed to ground any Hudsonians.

GENERAL MIGRATION

Common Nighthawks were reported as low statewide; the reported maximum statewide was 16 in Region 1. A Chimney Swift roost in Region 2 tallied 740 individuals, an average total for the location but lower than the maximum of 1000+. White-eyed Vireos made a strong showing upstate this fall with single reports from Regions 1, 2, and 7, plus two found in Region 8. Philadelphia Vireos were well reported from six Regions. A late Least Flycatcher in Region 2 on 1 October was surpassed by one in Region 10 on 16-18 November. 287 hummingbirds, presumably all Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, were tallied for the season at Chestnut Ridge Hawk Watch in Region 9, with a single day high count of 42 on 15 September. A November hummingbird in Region 1 was identified as a Ruby-throated after careful analysis; it lingered into early December providing a record late date for the Region. Late Sedge Wrens were noted in Regions 2, 6, and 7. Orange-crowned and Connecticut Warblers were

reported from six and seven Regions, respectively. Conversely, Cape May Warbler was reported from only four Regions. Single Yellow-throated, Prothonotary and Kentucky Warblers were found in Region 10, and Yellow-breasted Chat was reported from Regions 9 and 10. Clay-colored Sparrows are uncommon upstate in the fall, but this year they were reported from Regions 1, 2, 3, and 6 in addition to coastal Region 10, where they are more frequent. The only Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows upstate this fall were two at Ithaca in Region 3; coastally they were found in Regions 9 and 10. Henslow's Sparrows were noted on their Fort Drum breeding grounds until 8 September. Late migrants this season included an immature male Rose-breasted Grosbeak in Region 2 on 21 October and a Blue-winged Warbler in Region 3 on 30 October.

"WINTER" VISITORS

The signature avian event of this season may well have been the massive influx of two species of winter finches, White-winged Crossbill and Pine Siskin. The irruptions for both species extended well to the south, and some of the most significant concentrations were recorded in New York. Both species were recorded from all nine reporting Regions this season. High counts of White-winged Crossbill included 1,785 recorded in two and a half hours on 24 October in Region 2 and 1,660 in less than two hours on 3 November in Region 6. Pine Siskin numbers were topped by 6,520 on 10 November in Region 10; 2,524 on 13 October in Region 9; and 2,500 on 24 October in Region 2. The Regional reports contain further details on the specifics of the overall flights. Other winter finches were generally scarce. Red Crossbill was found in low numbers in all reporting Regions with the exception of Region 10, and, somewhat oddly, Adirondack Region 7. There were six Pine Grosbeaks reports scattered over four Regions. Evening Grosbeak was reported from four Regions as well, with only single birds seen outside Region 7. After last year's Common Redpoll invasion, only low numbers were found in a few Regions by the end of the reporting period. There were only three reports of Bohemian Waxwing for the season, two in Region 2 and one in Region 7.

RARITIES

There were a number of additional top-notch rarities not mentioned above. Cave Swallows continued their now-annual incursion into the state, with reports this year from five Regions, plus probable Cave Swallows in Region 6. All sightings occurred from 3 November to 18 November. Northern Rough-winged Swallow has established a similar late-fall pattern in the Northeast, albeit on a smaller scale. This year they were found on 11 November at Niagara Falls in Region 1, where they have occurred over the past several years, and, more unusually, on the coast at Breezy Point in Region 10. Rufous Hummingbirds have also made late-season inroads into the Northeast; this year, an adult male provided the first

Rockland County record, and in Region 10 a Rufous Hummingbird frequented the same feeders in Northport that had hosted one two years prior. Summer Tanager turns up occasionally in fall, and this year individuals were found in Region 1 and Region 10. Rare flycatchers made a nice showing upstate with a Say's Phoebe in Region 1 in October and a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Region 2 in November. The standout rarity in Region 6 was a Northern Wheatear present for a day only on 15 October, the only sighting for the state this year. A Eurasian Collared-Dove in Region 2 was found within a few miles of two previous Regional sightings. Region 10 hosted a series of additional rarities not mentioned above. Most prominent among these was a "Yellow" Wagtail found and nicely photographed by Doug Gochfeld at Plumb Beach, Brooklyn (Fig. A, p. 51). This is not only a potential first record for New York State, if accepted by NYSARC, but if it can be specifically identified within the "Yellow" Wagtail complex, could be a new species for North America. The complex was split by the American Ornithological Union in 2004; to date, all North American records pertain to Eastern Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla tschutschensis*, which breeds in northwestern Alaska and Canada. There are currently no accepted records arising from European populations. Plumb Beach also hosted a Le Conte's Sparrow in October. Additional highlights from Region 10 included Black-throated Gray Warbler and American White Pelican from Central Park; the Region's first Lark Bunting in nearly 20 years; and a Yellow-headed Blackbird in Montauk.

BIRD OF THE SEASON

It was a good season for rarities, many of which would make a respectable Bird of the Season. Some of the more exciting rarities reported statewide included Say's Phoebe in Region 1, Eurasian Collared-Dove in Region 2, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Region 3, Northern Wheatear in Region 6, Swallow-tailed Kite in Region 9, and Bridled Tern, Black-throated Gray Warbler, and Lark Bunting in Region 10. The Magnificent Frigatebirds from Region 3 and Region 10 would make good choices, particularly since so many people were able to see them. In my opinion, though, the "Yellow" Wagtail in Region 10 is the clear choice for Bird of the Season. Wherever this bird originated from, it is a rarity on a "lower 48" level in addition to being a potential first state record.

