

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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Summer was generally cool and damp, and many residents of northern New York felt that it really wasn't a summer at all. The mean temperature in Watertown was 63.5° F in June and 67.3° in July, which were 1.8° and 2.9° below normal, respectively. August's mean temperature of 69.9° was 1.3° above normal. The 1.9" of precipitation that fell in June was actually 1.5" below normal, but the month was characterized by many cool, damp days, and, coming on the heels of an exceptionally wet May, it certainly seemed wetter than usual. July was wetter than average, as the 4.6" of precipitation for the month was 1.3" above normal. The 3.2" of rain that fell in August was within an inch of normal.

It's tempting to attribute to the weather the presence of several species of birds not normally found in New York during the summer months, but the actual explanations are likely more varied. Seasonally unusual waterfowl included a Snow Goose at Perch River WMA through at least mid-July that many observers surmised was injured and a late flock of Brant seen flying over Lake Ontario 15 June. Another late migrant was a Horned Grebe in Norwood on two days in early June. Among the season's highlights was an apparently healthy Snowy Owl that continued from the spring in Clayton through at least 22 July. A quick and incomplete review of historic Kingbird reports turned up no summer Snowy Owl reports predating the birds that occurred in Region 6 and elsewhere during 2006, but the occurrence of this species in northern New York into at least early summer may be more frequent than is generally recognized (Tom MacDonald pers. comm.).

Nesting waterfowl numbers and productivity seemed about average, at least based on the numbers of broods seen at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA and a few other local duck hotspots. More adult Trumpeter Swans were at Perch River WMA than in past years, and at least one pair fledged four young. Redhead are generally scarce in Region 6 during summer, so a group of 47 at Wilson Hill 29 August was noteworthy. Redhead have nested at this location historically, but it is unclear whether they nested this summer, as I received no reports from earlier in the summer, and in fact have received no breeding season reports of Redhead in several years.

On or slightly before 24 August a **Brown Pelican** that previously had been seen in Region 5 appeared at Low's Lake, where it was observed begging from people and even perched atop a kayak that was in use. The pelican was eventually captured and taken to a wildlife rehabilitator, but was in very poor condition and died a short while later. The pelican was a male originally banded in 2001 in Maryland. The death of this bird, along with accounts of begging and other abnormal behaviors for a wild bird stirred up a lively debate about whether such vagrants seen to be in poor health should be captured and cared for. The

Great Egret roost in Stockholm continues to set new record maximum counts for Region 6, with the highest single count of 145 in late August.

Water levels were very high throughout the summer, with virtually no shorebird habitat along the Lake Ontario shoreline. It should therefore come as no surprise that several observers commented on the almost total lack of shorebirds on visits to the lakeshore. Whimbrel was perhaps the most notable of the exceptions to the general lack of birds, with three reports from late July and August. Single reports of White-rumped and Stilt Sandpipers came from St. Lawrence County, but many species were missed entirely.

The number of carcasses found on Little Galloo Island that were suspected to be the result of Type E botulism was lower than during the peak of the outbreak in 2006 and 2007, but higher than during 2008. Carcass search effort was reportedly similar between years, so clearly the outbreak has not subsided entirely, although at least one observer noted far fewer dead birds along the Lake Ontario shoreline this year than during the previous several. The Caspian Tern colony on Little Galloo continues to decline following the beginning of the outbreak, and the 1499 nests counted in 2009 was 23% below the record high count made in 2006. Double-crested Cormorant nest counts were also at their lowest level since they peaked in the mid-1990s, but this decline is largely the result of active management to control cormorant populations on Lake Ontario.

A one day maximum count of six Yellow-billed Cuckoos from Fort Drum illustrates the continued presence of this species in decent numbers several years after the end of the most recent large tent caterpillar outbreak. Short-eared Owls were observed in three locations in June, but the bird in at least one of these locations apparently departed during the middle of the month, and no evidence of nesting was reported. Common Nighthawk numbers were about typical on and near Fort Drum during June and July, but this species was almost entirely unreported during August, when large numbers of migrants typically pass through.

Passerine highlights included a singing male **Kentucky Warbler** Gerry Smith found in Hammond, a new species for Region 6. Unfortunately, subsequent efforts to relocate this bird were unsuccessful. Other highlights included a Louisiana Waterthrush along the Grass River in Russell, a location where this species has been found in the past, and Rusty Blackbirds on territory near Wanakena. This latter species is barely holding on as a breeder in the northern Adirondacks. There were a few reports of single Red and White-winged Crossbills, but these species were largely absent. Pine Siskins were slightly more abundant early in the season, but declined during June and were largely absent by mid-summer.

As they did in 2008, personnel from Fort Drum and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation visually confirmed the phenotypes of 189 singing male winged warblers on Fort Drum, yielding 36.5% Blue-winged Warblers, 47.1% Golden-winged Warblers, and 16.4% hybrids. These results are very similar to those obtained in 2008, albeit with a marginally smaller percentage of Golden-wings and higher percentage of Blue-wings. Crews from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology found Golden-winged Warblers to

be more abundant in St. Lawrence County relative to Blue-winged Warblers, but Blue-wings are established even in the northernmost portions of the Region.

As in most recent years, grassland birds continue to be found in historically low numbers. Sedge Wren is perhaps one exception, as numbers on Fort Drum steadily increased throughout June and July to a high of at least 39 singing males by early August. It is not clear to what extent later arrivals to Fort Drum represented recent migration into the Region or local movements of birds that were forced out of hayfields as they were mowed. At least 10 additional reports came from areas throughout the St. Lawrence Valley and Lake Ontario Plains. Upland Sandpipers were reported from seven locations, which is a modest increase over recent years, but likely represents better reporting rather than an increase in individuals, and the long-term prospects for this species in the Region remain a concern. At least 17 territorial male Henslow's Sparrows were found on Fort Drum, constituting the largest concentration of this species, as is typical. Five singing males on Dog Hill Road were also in a traditional location, but the two males Gerry Smith found in the town of Hammond represented a new location.

Although a few notable species of early "fall" migrants were seen on Fort Drum, overall few birds were seen migrating in August, and warblers seemed to move in especially small numbers. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, and Tennessee and Wilson's Warblers were all seen on Fort Drum during the last two weeks of August, but unlike the past few years, no substantial flocks of warblers were encountered.

The season's species tally was 197 species, which is the highest summer total in at least five years, although only by a few species. The clear highlights were Brown Pelican and Kentucky Warbler, although few people saw either bird, and the death of the pelican was disappointing. Weather aside, the lack of shorebird habitat again was among the biggest negatives for the season, and the continued occurrence of botulism in Lake Ontario was also bad news.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CV – T Cape Vincent; ED – El Dorado Shores Preserve, T Ellisburg; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; LGI – Little Galloo Island; LPd – Leonard Pond trail, T Colton; MM – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; SLR – St. Lawrence River; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower

Lakes WMA, T Canton; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WS – Winthrop Swamp, T Stockholm.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Snow Goose: PRWMA thru at least mid-Jul (mob).

Brant: 27 Lyme 15 Jun (NL), late.

Trumpeter Swan: up to 11 ad PRWMA thru; pr w 4 y PRWMA 20 Jul.

Wood Duck: max 91 ULLWMA 7 Aug.

Am. Wigeon: max 4 ULLWMA 7 Aug.

Blue-winged Teal: max 13 PRWMA 21 Aug.

Redhead: 47 WHWMA 29 Aug, many for date.

Ring-necked Duck: max 97 ULLWMA 21 Aug.

Spruce Grouse: ad f with 2 chicks MM 28 Jul (TB, GB, VP, photos).

Pied-billed Grebe: max 86 ULLWMA 16 Aug; many broods noted.

Horned Grebe: Norwood 7-8 Jun (JH), rare in summer.

BROWN PELICAN: wandered to Low's Lake from Region 5 by 24 Aug; picked up and taken to wildlife rehabilitator 26 Aug where it subsequently died.

Double-crested Cormorant: 2751 nests on LGI, Bass, Gull, and Calf Is, continuing downward trend from NYSDEC control efforts; 96 carcasses collected by DEC staff LGI, Type E botulism suspected.

Least Bittern: 2 PRWMA 5 June; 2 FD 3 Aug; WS 24 Aug.

Great Egret: max 145 WS 24 Aug.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: max 78 nests Gull Is.

HAWKS – ALCIDS

Golden Eagle: imm West Martinsburg 28 Jul (JB).

Merlin: CV 20 Aug; 3 MM 31 Jul.

Peregrine Falcon: CV 2 Jun (NL); PRWMA 10 & 23 Aug (JB).

Com. Moorhen: 16 FD 19 Aug, included 3 broods;

Sandhill Crane: 2-3 ad Madrid early Jul to at least 16 Aug (AJ fide JB); nesting not confirmed.

Solitary Sandpiper: arr FD 16 Jul.

Upland Sandpiper: pr CV 4 Jun; 3 Galloo Is. 12 Jun; Pamela 13 Jun; pr Lyme 14 Jun; Alexandria 14 Jun; Lafargeville 21 Jun; max 10 FD 1 Aug at traditional late summer gathering site.

Whimbrel: Hounsfield 12 Aug; 2 ED 22 Aug; CV 25 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: max 3 ED 23 Aug.

Least Sandpiper: max 4 Dekalb 12 Aug.

White-rumped Sandpiper: SLR Waddington 29 Aug.

Stilt Sandpiper: Canton 23 Aug.

Ring-billed Gull: 193 carcasses collected by DEC staff LGI; Type E botulism suspected.

Herring Gull: max 356 nests LGI.

Great Black-backed Gull: 2 ad LGI but no nest observed.

Caspian Tern: 1499 nests LGI 2 Jun, down 23% from record high count in 2005; 73 carcasses collected by DEC staff LGI, Type E botulism suspected.

Black Tern: 37 Wilson's Bay CV 2 Jun mobbing Peregrine Falcon.

PIGEONS – WOODPECKERS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: max 6 FD 4 Jun, high.

Black-billed Cuckoo: max 16 FD 4 Jun.

E. Screech-Owl: Canton several dates Jun.

Snowy Owl: Clayton thru 22 Jul (mob).

Short-eared Owl: FD 10 & 22 Jun (JB, AF); CV 16 Jun (NL), Ashland Flats WMA 16 Jun (NL); no reports after late Jun.

Com. Nighthawk: many breeding reports FD thru; Dekalb 9 Jun; few migrants noted.

Whip-poor-will: max 24 FD 5 Jun.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 9 territories FD thru; Hammond early June.

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: none found during surveys Francis Lake T Watson first time in several years; Tooley Pond Road T Clare 1 Aug; additional reports Colton, Fine, and Piercefield.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: max 11 singing m MM 13 Jun; Francis Lake T Watson Jun; arr FD 17 Aug.

Philadelphia Vireo: arr FD 24 Aug.

Gray Jay: max 7 MM 7 Jun.

Boreal Chickadee: max 6 LPd 13 Jul.

Carolina Wren: CV thru.

Sedge Wren: 2 singing m FD early Jun increased to 14 early Jul and 39 late Jul; different locations ULLWMA 8 & 27 Jun; Lyme 14 Jun; 2 Ashland Flats WMA 16 Jun; Antwerp 16 Jun; Potsdam 6 Jul to at least 9 Aug; 3 Dekalb 8 Jul.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: different locations FD 5 Jun & 21 Jul; 2 Limerick Cedars 9 Jun; FCWMA 27 Jul.

N. Mockingbird: max 2 singing m FD 19 Jun.

WARBLERS

Blue-winged Warbler: 69 singing m on FD surveys; fewer than 10 banded at Yellow Lake by Cornell field crew.

Golden-winged Warbler: 92 singing m on FD surveys; 50+ banded at Yellow Lake by Cornell field crews.

“Brewster’s” Warbler: 30 singing male on FD surveys.

“Lawrence’s” Warbler: ad m & ad f on neighboring territories FD 12 Jun.

Tennessee Warbler: arr FD 24 Aug.

Prairie Warbler: 4 CB 12 Jun; 4 Limerick Cedars 12 Jun; 7 FD 25 Jun.

Palm Warbler: max 31 singing m MM 13 Jun.

Blackpoll Warbler: last FD 4 Jun.

Cerulean Warbler: FD 25 Jun.

Louisiana Waterthrush: Downerville SF Russell 20 Jun.

KENTUCKY WARBLER: Hammond 27 Jun (GS!).

Wilson’s Warbler: arr FD 25 Aug.

TOWHEES – WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: max 19 singing m FD 10 Jun; no reports away from FD.

Henslow’s Sparrow: 14-16 singing m FD Jun increased to 17-19 by late Jul (JB); 5 singing m in two location Dog Hill Rd T Orleans (NL).

Lincoln’s Sparrow: max 19 singing m MM 13 Jun.

Rusty Blackbird: High Rock Trail Wanakena 9 Aug.

Red Crossbill: Brasher SF 9 Jul; FD 18 Jul.

White-winged Crossbill: FD 30 Jun.

Pine Siskin: scattered reports mostly from Adirondacks early Jun; scarce after mid-Jun.