

REGION 3—FINGER LAKES

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September got off to a chilly start, but average temperatures for the month were near normal. Precipitation for the month was slightly less than normal. October averaged 1.7° F cooler than normal, with average precipitation. November was 3.0° warmer than normal, with slightly less than average precipitation. An early snowfall of 2" on 16 October was the only snow recorded this season. It had some ornithological implications as discussed below looking at the grebes.

The Region's birders pay special attention to waterfowl in the fall through spring. This season, scrutiny of the exceptional duck and goose flocks of the Region turned up a full suite of regular uncommon to rare birds, including Greater White-fronted, Ross's, and Cackling Goose and Eurasian Wigeon. Mute Swan has a peculiar status in the Region. This season, only one individual was reported, an adult at Mud Lock on Cayuga Lake on 11-12 September. In the past, Mute Swan has been present in the area of Montezuma NWR spring through fall, with resident birds potentially moving a short distance to open water on Cayuga Lake during the winter. Examination of the hordes of Tundra Swans in recent winters has found Mutes and Trumpeters in the flocks. Special attention should be paid to swan identification in the Region with their changing status and distribution. Jay McGowan found a Bar-headed Goose at Montezuma NWR on 2 October; while this is a presumed escaped exotic that mixed in with

wild migrant geese, it is certainly worth paying attention to and documenting/recording non-native species that we encounter during our observations of wild birds. Analysis of patterns of records of the occurrence of Barnacle and Pink-footed Geese has largely resulted in a paradigm shift; while many used to dismiss such reports automatically as pertaining to escaped exotics, today most experts agree that many records of these species, including probably all Pink-footed Goose records in the northeastern US, represent wild vagrants, though escaped Barnacle Geese have been found.

Dave Nutter found a Pacific Loon at Sheldrake 5 November, and it lingered to at least 21 November. Distant photos, while inconclusive, suggested that this individual was a juvenile and therefore not a bird returning to the same site. Pacific Loon has been found at Sheldrake for several years running. Historical evidence has shown conclusively that multiple Pacific Loons have occurred on Cayuga Lake. This fall's bird suggests again that birders shouldn't necessarily assume that a "returning" rarity found at a familiar location is actually the same bird. Sheldrake is a site that attracts huge numbers of migrant Common Loons, and it stands to reason that rarities like Pacific Loon should be detected in small numbers each year. Perhaps continued scrutiny will resolve the status of this species in the Region and the State. Many Pied-billed Grebes were involved in a snow-related fallout at Stewart Park in Ithaca on 16 October. Counts peaked at 112 on 17 October and dropped back to two within a few days.

While walking his dog in Caroline on 17 October, John Confer encountered a rarely detected **Yellow Rail**. Inspired by the sighting, organized parties searched likely areas of the Montezuma NWR complex the next weekend but detected no Yellow Rails. Concerted efforts targeted at walking dense, low grass-type fields in mid to late fall might yield more records of this extremely reclusive migrant.

Shorebird watching at Montezuma NWR was focused on Mays Point Pool this fall, which attracted large numbers and good variety of shorebirds and waterfowl. Highlights at Mays Point Pool included American Avocet, Wilson's Phalarope, and Red-necked Phalarope. A rare-in-the-Region Western Sandpiper was studied at the MNWR visitor center on 11-12 September. It is rather interesting that Western Sandpiper is so rare in the Region; hundreds of Western Sandpipers can be seen together in fall on the Atlantic Coast from New Jersey south to Florida. These birds come from breeding grounds in Alaska. Western Sandpipers certainly come across the interior northeast at some point, but a paucity of records in interior New York and Pennsylvania begs the question: How do they get to the Atlantic Coast?

The winter gull season got off to an early start with Iceland, Thayer's, and Glaucous gulls reported on Cayuga Lake or in nearby Dryden during early November. A Laughing Gull showed up on the lighthouse jetty at Stewart Park, Ithaca, on 24 October. A juvenile Thayer's Gull appeared at Sheldrake on 6 November and was found further south on Cayuga Lake at Ithaca on 7 November, where it remained until 10 November. Solid, well-documented reports of this problem taxon are increasing in the Region.

Several passerines were detected unusually late this fall, including Least Flycatcher, Blue-headed Vireo, Barn Swallow, and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Four ***Petrochelidon* swallows** in Ithaca on 31 October were likely Cave Swallows given the date and recent pattern of Cave Swallow expansion and late fall vagrancy, but distant looks precluded conclusive identification. Warbler migration was interesting this year, with good numbers of boreal species being found, especially Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers. Rare species included a dull “Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler seen briefly in Ithaca and an immature female Connecticut Warbler banded at Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory in Schuyler County.

Finches were rather lightly represented, especially in the context of the past two years of large redpoll, siskin, and crossbill flights. A few Pine Siskins were reported, and only a single White-winged Crossbill was found, following a record year, fall 2008 - spring 2009, in the Region for both species.

Rarity highlights of the fall season included Pacific Loon, Yellow Rail, American Avocet, Laughing Gull, Thayer’s Gull, “Audubon’s” Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Connecticut Warbler.

In general, observers in the Region are heavily invested in the use of eBird for logging and tracking bird sightings. eBird data were used extensively in the preparation of this report, as were reports from the listserv, Cayugabirds-L.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CU – Cornell University, Ithaca; KHAMO – Kestrel Haven Avian Migration Observatory, Burdett; MNWR – Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; MyPt – Myers Point; StP – Stewart Park, Ithaca; SSW – Sapsucker Woods.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Mute Swan: Mud Lock 11-12 Sep (TBJ, TCL, JWM, CJW), only report.

Trumpeter Swan: sev MNWR thru (mob).

Greater White-fronted Goose: arr MNWR 26 Sep (CJ, LL, KR); Aurora Bay 7 Nov (BC); last MNWR 29 Nov (CG, PB).

Ross’s Goose: arr MNWR 26 Sep (MM, MGH, SMB, CJW); Savannah Mucklands 28 Oct – 22 Nov (JHB, MGH, TBJ, CLW).

Snow Goose: 1 dark morph adult StP 1 Sep (TBJ), summered here; max 8000 Savannah Mucklands 21 Nov (TBJ).

Cackling Goose: arr 5 MNWR 10 Oct (BC); StP 31 Oct - 28 Nov (KR, MGH, TBJ, MM, MS, CWS); max 7 Deans Cove 22 Nov.

BAR-HEADED GOOSE: MNWR 3 Oct (JWM), presumed escaped/ released, *intro*.

Eurasian Wigeon: arr MNWR 6 Sep (TBJ, TCL, CJW); last MNWR 26 Oct (KH).

Ruddy Duck: max 245 northwest corner of Cayuga Lake 21 Nov (TBJ).

PACIFIC LOON: Sheldrake 5-21 Nov (DNu; WH, DNi, DW).

Com. Loon: max 240 Sheldrake 6 Nov (TBJ).

Pied-billed Grebe: max 112 StP 17 Oct (KR, TCL, DNu, PA).

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Osprey: Dryden 25 Oct (CLW).

YELLOW RAIL: Caroline 17 Oct (JC).

Sandhill Crane: MNWR thru (max 14); 13 Dryden 10 Oct (CLW).

AMERICAN AVOCET: MNWR thru 11 Sep (mob).

Sanderling: MNWR 8 Sep (Bmc).

Western Sandpiper: MNWR 11-12 Sep (CTH, AVK, JG).

Long-billed Dowitcher: MNWR 6 Sep - 2 Nov (JHB, CLW).

Wilson's Phalarope: MNWR 2-9 Sep (DNu, mob).

Red-necked Phalarope: 2 StP 1 Sep (TBJ); MNWR 3 Sep (DNu).

LAUGHING GULL: Ithaca 24 Oct (AM, BMc).

THAYER'S GULL: Sheldrake 6 Nov (TBJ); Ithaca 7-10 Nov (TBJ, CWS).

Iceland Gull: arr Dryden 8 Nov (KJM).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: arr Ithaca 12 Sep (GFS, NRS).

Glaucous Gull: arr Ithaca 5 Nov (TBJ).

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Long-eared Owl: Mt. Pleasant, Dryden 15 Sep (BMc).

Red-headed Woodpecker: arr Brooktondale 11 Sep (SP); Dryden 24-26 Oct (CLW).

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Least Flycatcher: Ithaca 8 Nov (MGH), late.

Blue-headed Vireo: Lansing 7 Nov (MGH, TBJ, MM, MS, CWS), late.

Cliff Swallow: StP 13 Oct (CLW, JHB, JG), late.

Cliff/ Cave Swallow sp.: 4 StP 31 Oct (TBJ).

Barn Swallow: Sheldrake 6 Nov (TBJ), late.

Sedge Wren: MNWR 11 Sep (TBJ, TCL, JWM, CJW).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: Ithaca 1 Nov (CJW), late.

WARBLERS

Golden-winged Warbler: SSW 9 Sep (GFS).

"AUDUBON'S" YELLOW-RUMPED

WARBLER: Hog Hole Ithaca 20 Oct (TBJ).

CONNECTICUT WARBLER: imm f banded KHAMO 2 Oct (JSG).

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Nelson's Sparrow: arr Hog Hole Ithaca 2 Oct (TBJ); max 2 Hog Hole Ithaca 9 Oct (TBJ, MJI, TCL).

Grasshopper Sparrow: Freese Rd., Dryden 18 Sep (KJM).

White-winged Crossbill: Mecklenburg 3 Sep (ND).

Pine Siskin: arr Lansing 12 Sep (RD); last Dryden 23 Nov (JHB, CLW).