

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SPRING 2009

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Overall, the spring was warm and dry as mentioned in almost all reports. “Silent Spring”-like conditions were reported from R8 where spring migration was preceded by an early leaf out. On the opposite side of the coin from the warm and dry trend, observations came in from R1 of Yellow Warblers and Baltimore Orioles feeding in the snow, certainly an odd juxtaposition.

Interesting waterfowl hybrid reports came in from upstate, with a Blue-winged Teal x Northern Shoveler in R2 and two Northern Pintail x Mallards, one in R2 and another in R8. Observers are encouraged to track such hybrids; while the utility of such records is perhaps not obvious at face value (except in circumstances where conservation initiatives are tied up in pure-versus-hybrid populations, such as with Golden-winged Warbler), hybrids are fun to look at, challenge our identification skills, and encourage us to search through every last bird in a flock. Five Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were found at the west end of Oneida Lake in R5. This is the first report for the species in NY of multiple individuals. The apparently wild nature of the flock and the huge influx of the species north out of its widening Gulf Coast haunts this season both suggest that these birds will provide New York’s long-awaited first acceptable record. It seems possible that this flock was the same that stopped at a pond near this author’s home in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania the day before the NY sighting. Other sightings of five whistling-ducks in the region could also pertain to these individuals.

Western Grebes were recorded in R2 and R10. The coastal record fits with a now-annual pattern, but even the record from Wayne County was a 12th regional report. Swallow-tailed Kites were seen in both R9 and R10, continuing the trend of spring sightings in the northeast. Sandhill Cranes continue to be reported widely throughout the state, including well away from their Lake Ontario Plain stronghold. However, while Regions 6, 8, and 9 noted Sandhill Crane records as being more prevalent than normal, Regions 2 and 5 reported a decline in records during this season. Two Mew Gulls were detected this period; one continued from the winter period in R10 and another was a first Westchester County record in R9. In R7, the spectacular trio of Tufted Duck, Northern Hawk Owl, and Ivory Gull continued from the winter season.

The R10 report details some particularly interesting “event” reports, including good pelagic bird diversity detected on a few trips offshore and Andrew Farnsworth’s 21 May crepuscular flight. This was in addition to some great rarities including a Pacific Loon in late May, two Wilson’s Plovers, and a “Sooty” Fox Sparrow, all photographed.

This season, Regional editors continue to note the utility of eBird in compiling seasonal reports. Some respected observers note a lack of historical

perspective with the use of eBird, given that the majority of records have been contributed in the last five years; however, the sheer volume of up-to-date data provides an absolute wealth of sightings for these recent years. Increased buy-in from the New York birding community will go a long way toward increasing the usefulness of eBird in the future. Adoption of eBird by readers of this journal, the leaders of the New York birding community, will surely continue to trickle down to beginners who are learning methods of record keeping and responsible reporting.

There has been concern from some in the New York birding community that contributions of rarity records to eBird might replace the appropriate submission of reports to NYSARC. As both an active eBird user and a member of NYSARC, I think this concern can be assuaged. Regional reviewers of eBird are encouraged to follow up on “exceptional” records and can forward details to NYSARC for consideration by that committee.

For sheer rarity, number of satisfied observers, and quality of documentation, the “Sooty” Fox Sparrow might win the “bird of the season” award. However I’m going to call it for the Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. Although it is true that these birds disappointed many by not sticking around for more than a day at their upstate haunts, something tells me that the downstate folks will already have had a taste of a wild Black-bellied Whistling-Duck by the time this column is printed (I “predict” Jamaica Bay in late July/ early August...).

SPRING ARRIVAL DATES FOR 2010

Region	Species Reported ¹	Seasonality ² vs. 87-08	Advance ³ (Days)	Record Early Spp.
1	91	-1.75	-0.97	7
2	92	-2.89	-3.11	4
3	86	-2.29	-2.17	6
4	85	-3.91	1.73	7
5	93	-1.39	0.62	3
6	90	-5.06	4.29	10
7	84	-5.03	5.06	10
8	86	-4.19	0.32	7
9	90	-1.92	-0.99	10
10	87	-3.13	-4.78	3

¹Maximum number of species = 93.

²Average arrival in a Region compared to that Region’s 23-year average.

³Average arrival in a Region compared to the average of all Regions.

Given difficulties in estimating arrivals of some species in some Regions, estimates of Seasonality and Advance should be interpreted with caution.