

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

The summer was a little warmer and a lot wetter than average, with most of the precipitation coming during the first two months of the season. Watertown's mean June temperature of 65.9° was only 0.6° above normal, but July was a full 3° warmer than average, and August was 1.6° warmer than usual. The dry conditions that prevailed throughout the preceding six months did not extend into summer, however, as the 14.8" of rain that fell during the summer was 145% of normal. June was particularly wet, with 6.4" falling on Watertown, and July wasn't much drier, as another 5.7" fell that month.

The seemingly perpetual June rain resulted in high water throughout the Region, which was quite startling given the drought-like conditions that prevailed all spring. High water likely flooded at least some waterfowl nests as well as the nests of other ground-nesting birds, but I received little direct information to this effect. Certainly the numbers of Ring-necked Duck and Pied-billed Grebe broods at Upper and Lower Lakes seemed consistent with recent years, although the Common Loon nest on Lower Lake apparently failed. Several observers thought that waterfowl numbers later in the summer were low, but it is not clear that these observations reflect poor nest success.

Nick Leone saw two female Common Goldeneye on the St. Lawrence River near Clayton in late August. He saw no indication that these birds nested, but Picton Island, the only location in Jefferson County where nesting has been documented, is just a couple of miles from where Nick saw these birds. Two days later I saw a juvenile Red-necked Grebe on the river, presumably an early migrant. Although waterfowl were relatively scarce throughout much of the Region, good numbers of ducks gathered at Wilson Hill during August, including nearly 200 Wood Ducks and 62 Redhead.

Raptors were found in generally typical numbers with one notable exception. The local Merlin nesting population continues to explode, with two new nesting sites on Fort Drum and several other suspected locations from all areas of Region 6. Merlins have now become an almost daily sight in many areas. A juvenile Peregrine Falcon flew over Fort Drum on 24 August, where it briefly paused to give a female and immature Northern Harrier a little grief.

Water levels along the Lake Ontario and St. Lawrence River shorelines were relatively low in early June, but shorebirds were scarce. Summer rains quickly brought the water up, and by mid-July very little shoreline was exposed, and shorebirds were consequently scarce to absent. A few of the most common shorebird species were seen in small numbers at widely scattered locations, but I received no reports of any notable species or concentrations.

Sandhill Cranes summered in Ellisburg during 2008 and possibly 2009, and in Lisbon during 2009, but I heard no reports from either location this spring or summer. Finally, during September I heard that the Lisbon cranes had been present all summer and that cranes were observed during August in Ellisburg. None of these reports were from active birders, but if true, there is a reasonable possibility that Sandhill Cranes are nesting in Jefferson and/or St. Lawrence Counties, something that needs serious investigation during 2011.

Thanks in large part to Lee Harper's excellent work to enhance nest site quality and reduce predation at nest sites, the number of Common Tern nests on the St. Lawrence River reached a new high this year. Of the 1,001 nests found between Lake Ontario and Massena, 908 were on natural islands and especially artificial structures (mostly navigation cells) on the New York side of the river. The total for this stretch of river has risen steadily from just over 600 nests in 2000. After many years of explosive growth, the Caspian Tern colony on Little Galloo Island started declining in 2006 in response to botulism-induced mortality. Type E botulism is still present in eastern Lake Ontario, but the outbreak seems to have lessened in severity, and Caspian Tern nest numbers appear to have stabilized at slightly below 1,500 nests a year. Black Terns continue to decline, and the total found in Region 6 on this year's state-wide count represents a 17% decline compared to the last count conducted in 2007. Still, Jefferson County accounted for 58% of all Black Terns counted in the state, with the majority of birds occurring at Perch River WMA.

Yellow-billed Cuckoos continue to occur throughout the Region in numbers that were unprecedented prior to the mid-2000s tent caterpillar outbreak, but perhaps are finally starting to decline. Several observers noted that Yellow-billed and especially Black-billed Cuckoos were unusually vocal during a couple of weeks in early to mid-August. As usual, good numbers of Whip-poor-will and Common Nighthawk were reported in June and July, the latter primarily on Fort Drum, but relatively few migrating nighthawks were observed in August.

I heard about a few Upland Sandpipers in Jefferson County, but generally grassland birds were poorly documented away from Fort Drum. The only Henslow's Sparrows I'm aware of were those I found on Fort Drum and a group of at least six on Dog Hill Road in Orleans that several birders visiting from out

of the Region told me about. As far as I can tell, few observers looked elsewhere for this species. The same goes for Sedge Wren, with at least 18 territorial males on Fort Drum and none anywhere else. Sedge Wrens again showed a totally different pattern of arrival and territorial occupation this year than last. During 2009, wrens arrived in multiple waves between early June and August, with the majority arriving after the beginning of July. This year, virtually all of the males I found were present by the end of June, and there was no substantial arrival of new males during mid-summer. Given the paucity of grassland bird reports this year, it's not clear to me that anybody looked for these species in Region 6 except for a few birders visiting the Region from other parts of the state, and who inevitably went to the same couple of locations.

The status of Golden-winged Warblers in northern New York is somewhat clearer, as this species has been the focus of substantial survey efforts for several years. On Fort Drum, the situation is starting to look grim, as Blue-winged Warblers are now equally as common as Golden-winged Warblers, and numbers of hybrids are increasing as well. Blue-winged Warblers are much less common just north of Fort Drum and throughout most of the St. Lawrence Valley, although even there hybrids are increasing. Currently the largest numbers of Golden-winged Warblers appear to be in the Indian River Lakes region of eastern Jefferson and western St. Lawrence Counties. The most unusual warbler sighting of the year was of a Louisiana Waterthrush feeding a fledgling along the Grass River near the northern boundary of Adirondack Park.

The early passerine migration seemed more active than last year. Yellow Warblers and Bobolinks were conspicuously moving by the end of July, but the first truly obvious migrant was a Swainson's Thrush on Fort Drum 17 Aug. Migrants passed through in good diversity during the last week of the month, including Yellow-bellied Flycatchers on several dates, Philadelphia Vireos on Fort Drum 26 and 30 August, three Cape May Warblers and a Wilson's Warbler at Indian Creek Nature Center on the 28th, and Lincoln's Sparrows at different locations on the St. Lawrence River on the 27th and 28th.

Boreal species were generally reported in typical numbers from southern St. Lawrence County, although Palm Warblers appear to be increasing, with reports coming from many bogs and fens in the southeastern corner of the county. The only Rusty Blackbirds were from the High Falls Trail area near Wanakena. I heard one White-winged Crossbill fly over the Leonard Pond area on 13 August, and a Pine Siskin over Fort Drum on 2 August, but by season's end no large finch flight was evident.

For the season I received reports of 191 species, which is a little on the low side of average. No great rarities were reported, so to me the highlights were increasing numbers of Common Tern nests along the St. Lawrence River and confirmed nesting for Louisiana Waterthrush in St. Lawrence County. The low point has to be the continued poor coverage of the Region by birders, as reflected by the general lack of grassland bird reports or the inability of any birders to determine whether the Sandhill Cranes that apparently summered in two locations actually nested.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Belford, Jeff Bolsinger, Richard & Marion Brouse, Carol Cady, Corey Callaghan, Bernie Carr, Sheila Cerwonka, Joan Collins, Lee Harper, Steve Kelling, Tom Langen, Nick Leone, Patricia J. Lindsay, Irene Mazzocchi, Shaibal S. Mitra, David Prosser, Adam Sabatine, Robert Scranton, Gerry Smith, Michael Stewart, Tom & Eileen Wheeler.

ABBREVIATIONS

CI – Carleton Island SLR; CV – T Cape Vincent; ED – El Dorado Shores Preserve, T Ellisburg; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton; 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; SWG – St. Lawrence County Wetlands and Grasslands Management District, T Dekalb; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WS – Winthrop Swamp, T Stockholm.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Trumpeter Swan: Wellesley Is 19 & 23 Jun; only report away from PRWMA.

Wood Duck: max 182 WHWMA 14 Aug.

Am. Wigeon: max 12 ULLWMA 22 Aug.

Blue-winged Teal: max 8 ICNC 28 Aug & SGW 29 Aug.

Redhead: 3 arr WHWMA 7 Aug where 62 by 27 Aug.

Ring-necked Duck: up to 7 broods per day ULLWMA Jul & Aug.

Com. Goldeneye: 2 f SLR Clayton 25 Aug (NL).

Com. Merganser: brood 8 chicks Brasher SF 6 Jun.

Red-breasted Merganser: SLR Massena 17 Jul.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 63 ULLWMA 15 Aug.

Red-necked Grebe: juv SLR Massena 27 Aug.

Least Bittern: max 4 ULLWMA 25 Jun.

Great Egret: 54 at WS roost 31 Jul; 145 at same site 24 Aug.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: 42 PRWMA 20 Jun.

HAWKS—ALCIDS

Merlin: 2 new nesting locations FD; many reports throughout.

Peregrine Falcon: FD 24 Aug.

Com. Moorhen: at least 2 pr SGW new nesting location in created wetland; numbers improved at 2 sites since 2008.

Sandhill Crane: late reports from Ellisburg and Lisbon in areas where summered during 2009 and 2010 respectively; few details.

Black-bellied Plover: ED 2 Jun; only report.

Semipalmated Plover: max 7 SWG 4 Aug.

Solitary Sandpiper: last spring migrant Pamela 2 Jun; arr Dekalb 14 Jul.

Upland Sandpiper: 2 territories FD Jun; 4 Chaumont 18 Jun; few other breeding season reports; max 13 FD 11 Aug; last FD 25 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: scattered reports of 1-2 per day early Jun & Aug.

Least Sandpiper: max 7 SWG 11 Aug.

Com. Tern: 908 nests NYS side SLR between CV & Massena (LH).

Caspian Tern: 1472 nests LGI (IM).

Black Tern: max 65 pr PRWMA; 40 pr at 4 additional sites JEFF; 19 pr ULLWMA (NYSDEC survey).

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: fewer FD than previous 5 years; Dekalb 5 Jul.

Black-billed Cuckoo: many heard calling throughout Region 12-19 Aug.

Eastern Screech-Owl: 2 Carleton Is 28 Aug.

Com. Nighthawk: up to 12 per day FD Jun; several reports 12-20 migrants 18-24 Aug.

Whip-poor-will: total 117 on 6 10-stop survey routes FD.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 8-10 pairs FD.

FLYCATCHERS—WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: migrant FD 1 Jun; several reports of decreased numbers at traditional Adirondack nesting sites.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: FD 24 & 25 Aug; CI 28 Aug.

Philadelphia Vireo: FD 26 & 30 Aug.

Carolina Wren: Canton 7 Aug.

Sedge Wren: 18 singing m FD where all arr by late Jun; no other reports.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: Massena 7 Aug; FD 11 Aug; CI 28 Aug.

Swainson's Thrush: arr FD 17 Aug.

N. Mockingbird: 2 locations FD Jun & Jul.

WARBLERS

Blue-winged Warbler: numbers virtually equal to Golden-winged Warbler FD; much less abundant N JEFF and STLA.

Golden-winged Warbler: highest numbers Indian River Lakes N JEFF & W STLA.

Hybrid Golden-winged/Blue-winged Warbler: increasing throughout.

Tennessee Warbler: last spring migrant FD 4 Jun; FD 24 & 31 Aug.

Yellow Warbler: flock 45+ Barnhart Is. 31 Jul.

Cape May Warbler: 3 ICNC 28 Aug.

Prairie Warbler: CI 28 Aug.

Palm Warbler: probable or confirmed nesting MM, Fox Marsh T Colton; near LPd; High Falls Trail T Fine; Horseshoe Bog T Piercefield.

Bay-breasted Warbler: FD 31 Aug.

Blackpoll Warbler: FD 24 & 31 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: several reports Dekalb.

Louisiana Waterthrush: ad feeding y Donnerville SF T Russell 9 Jul (JB).

Wilson's Warbler: ICNC 28 Aug.

TANAGERS—WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: one-day max 23 singing males FD 2 Jun; possible migrant CI 28 Aug.

Henslow's Sparrow: 18-23 terr males FD Jun & Jul; 6 Dog Hill Road T Orleans 14 Jul.

Lincoln's Sparrow: arr Massena 27 Aug; 2 Carleton Is 28 Aug.

Rusty Blackbird: High Falls Trail T Fine 25 Jul.

White-winged Crossbill: Lpd 13 Aug.

Pine Siskin: FD 2 Aug.

Evening Grosbeak: 2 Brasher SF 6 Jun; only report away from Adirondacks.