

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—FALL 2010

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As always, the fall season was interesting this year. In preparing to write another Highlights I was reminded again that it is advantageous for the Highlights author to also be the editor of the Regional reports. Editing the reports requires working through all in some detail, and researching the highlights aids editing and proof reading the reports. It is hoped that someone will volunteer to do both tasks.

WEATHER

The weather across the state and through the season was about as uniform and benign as we could imagine for fall. For all months in all Regions, temperatures averaged from near-normal to mostly 0-2° F above normal, with September 3.4-4.0° above in a few places. Summer extended well into fall, and by season's end there was not even any significant snowfall anywhere. The only specific notes on frost were a first frost on 19 October in Region 8, with the first killing frost there on 1 November. Rainfall was below normal or only slightly above in nearly all months and all Regions, especially to the farthest east and west in the State. However, all but Region 1 saw a huge rainfall from Tropical Storm Nichole 30 September to 1 October, often in the 3"-4"+ range, which pushed the October and a couple of September totals way above normal (wettest since 1895 in Region 7). These rains inundated many shorebird areas and wiped out thoughts of good late-season shorebirding in many places across the state.

The Region 3 report noted strong patterns of back-to-back cold fronts with NW winds, and an effect of this in Region 10 was very few pelagic records from shore, though there was very good pelagic birding offshore. Many Regions noted fallouts of passerines in the 3 and 8-12 September; 1, 7, 20-23, and late October; and 23 November time periods. To several Regional Editors, the fall passerine passage was good over an extended period of time, with many late departure dates noted. An illustration of how good the fall was generally can be seen in the 308 species recorded for the season in Region 10; more than nearly any other Region tallies for a year. About 36 of these species were reported only from Region 10.

WATERBIRDS

The waterfowl migration was generally weak this season. Most species were reported in average to low or even very low numbers. Snow Goose maxima were low except for a couple of counts in Regions 3 and 7. Only Region 5 posted a really good Brant tally. A wild-banded **Barnacle Goose** was finally confirmed in Region 10, with origin information obtained. Mute Swan was

noted in triple-digit numbers in Regions 2 and 10 and in five Regions overall. Trumpeter Swan was reported in four Regions. Puddle ducks were generally poor—only one Region with a maximum for N. Pintail over 100; some good Wood Duck counts; and two N. Shoveler tallies over 200. Divers fared little better except for some good scoter counts, especially for White-winged Scoter, from Regions 5, 7, and 10; scaup counts of over 1000 in Regions 6 and 10; and 2000+ Ring-necked Ducks in Region 6. King Eider was reported in five Regions, Common Eider in good numbers in Region 10, and Ruddy Duck in good numbers in Regions 1 and 10 and ok numbers in Regions 2 and 5. Among the rarer waterfowl, Greater White-fronted Goose was noted in Regions 1, 3, and 10; Ross's Goose in Region 3; Cackling Goose in seven Regions, with double-digit peaks in Regions 1 and 2; Eurasian Wigeon was located in five Regions, but in lower numbers than usual in Regions 3 and 10; and Harlequin Duck was reported only in Region 10. Canvasback, Redhead, and both scaup were flagged for particularly low numbers.

Loons and grebes shared in the comments around poor numbers. The only really good Common Loon count was from Region 3. But on the brighter side, Pacific Loon was found in Regions 3 and 8 and Eared Grebe in Regions 1 and 3. Despite control efforts, Double-crested Cormorant maxima were over 1000 in four Regions. Great Cormorant was reported as expected in Regions 9 and 10 but also as a first county record in Clinton County in Region 7.

Among the herons and egrets, one sign of major change is maximum counts of 151 birds inland in Regions 1 and 6. Beyond these, wandering Herons were few, including Little Blue Heron and a *plegadis* ibis in Region 3 and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in Region 1.

RAPTORS

The most complete hawk flight data is from the fall mountain hawkwatches in Region 9 and the Fire Island coastal hawkwatch in Region 10, with additional data from a Noonmark Mt. watch in Region 7 and Derby Hill and nearby in Region 5. The migration was more spread out than usual in Region 9, with peaks for the same species variable across watches in just that relatively limited area. The Fire Island Hawkwatch experienced the best total since 1994, with several species at record high totals. Across the State, we see Osprey at late dates in many Regions, N. Goshawk and Red-shouldered Hawk numbers low in most Regions, Rough-legged Hawk arriving in all Regions in October to early November, and Golden Eagle reported from all but one Region. Black Vulture occurred where now expected in Regions 8 and 10 plus a few more reports in Region 2. The only really rarer species was a juvenile Mississippi Kite in Region 5.

SHOREBIRDS, GULLS, AND TERNS

Overall, there were problems with lack of habitat and relatively poor numbers for most shorebirds across the state and through the season. However, all

expected species were reported at least somewhere and a number of rarer species were noted. Among the more interesting observations were: American Oystercatcher in Regions 9 and 10, with a maximum of 312 in Region 10; American Avocet and Willet in Regions 1 and 10; few Red Knot and in only Regions 3 and 10; Western Sandpiper in Regions 7 and 10; two Buff-breasted Sandpipers state record-late on 26 October in Region 10; Ruff in Regions 1 and 3; and low numbers for both dowitchers and all the phalaropes.

Peak counts were generally average to low for many species of gulls and terns. The usual Bonaparte's Gull movement along the south shore of Lake Ontario, often accompanied by other rarer gulls, was weak and the rarities few. Still, as always, there were highlights: Black-legged Kittiwake was noted in five Regions, with a maximum of 21 in Region 10; a Regional high count of five Sabine's Gulls was reported in Region 2; Black-headed Gull was reported in Regions 2 and 10; Franklin's Gull was seen in Regions 2, 3, and 10; the white-winged gulls appeared as expected late in the season; and Lesser Black-backed Gull was reported in six Regions, with a maximum of 34 in Region 10.

Least, Gull-billed, Roseate, and Royal Terns and Black Skimmer were all noted in Region 10, all but Gull-billed to late dates, and with a Black Skimmer peak count of 682. Jaegers were well reported in both the usual coastal and Great Lakes areas. Long-tailed Jaeger was noted in Regions 2, 5, and 7, with individuals into October in each Region, a bit later than typical.

SEABIRDS

In this grouping, I will lump the whole range of petrels, shearwaters, and alcid, though they are well separated taxonomically. There were no reports of any of these away from coastal areas, not even any N. Gannets on the Great Lakes, and Seth Ausubel provides a great summary in the Region 10 report which you should read. There are rare petrels, storm-petrels, and shearwaters offshore, a Brown Booby story, and several alcid species.

LANDBIRDS

As usual, owl reporting was sporadic. No Snowy Owls were reported through season's end, but Short-eared Owls arrived when and where expected in six Regions, and N. Saw-whet Owl was also reported in six Regions, with note of 44 banded at one site in Region 1.

This fall Ruby-throated Hummingbird persisted into late September and on into October in all Regions reporting and even to 22 November in Region 10, where a peak count of 61 was also noted in mid-September.

Passerines are a huge grouping to summarize, especially with the comments suggesting a good migration over a prolonged period. Starting with the flycatchers, we have Olive-sided in an encouraging six Regions, Yellow-bellied to mid-October in Regions 1 and 9, Great Crested to 18 October in Region 5, an Ash-throated in Region 10, and eight reports of Western Kingbird in Region 10. Northern Shrike arrived in most Regions in the period 8 October

to 2 November. In the vireo family we find an immature White-eyed Vireo banded on 10 November in Region 2, late Blue-headed Vireos in Regions 9 and 10, and Philadelphia Vireo well reported in all Regions in good numbers. Common Raven was also well reported across the State, with a Regional most-ever 20+ reports in Region 10.

Swallow maxima were generally low across the State and departure dates typical to occasionally toward late normal. The big story here was Cave Swallow, for which we have come to expect a late-season influx following appropriate fast-moving storm system from the Southwest. Flights occurred in late October, when birds were reported from in Regions 2, 5, 9, and 10, with a maximum of 21 in Region 5, then again 23-26 November, when a less obviously appropriate weather system brought many more sightings in Regions 1, 2, 5, 9, and 10, with over 200 tallied in Region 2 and a maximum of 14 in Region 10. See Dave Tetlow's note elsewhere in this issue.

There was some irruptive movement of both Black-capped Chickadee and Red-breasted Nuthatch noted in several Regions. In Region 2, a big burst of Black-capped Chickadees beginning about 20 October resulted in over 1000 banded at the Kaiser-Manitou passerine banding station over a few days. During those days I was at the lakewatch at Hamlin Beach SP about 12 miles to the west each morning and noted essentially no chickadee passage there. Since the waterfowl movement those days was slow, I also then walked wooded sections of the park each day without recording exceptional chickadee numbers. Later, near the end of the period, Dave Tetlow was watching the lake from a point nearby and had a good chickadee movement which included also a Boreal Chickadee. Boreal Chickadee was also recorded as a rarity in Regions 8 and 10 and where expected in Regions 6 and 7.

Winter Wren, both kinglets, most of the thrushes, and some of the sparrows noted in low numbers last fall were reported in normal or higher numbers this fall over extended date ranges. It is interesting that comments on large night flights are often couched in terms of hearing thrushes, especially from mid-September through the first week of October. A related theme concerns the numbers of thrushes found on the ground the next day. In several instances this fall, thrushes were not found the day following big numbers heard at night, but 20-25 species of warblers or good numbers of sparrows were tallied.

Disparities reported for nocturnal vs. diurnal counts of migrant thrushes mesh with my own observations this fall and over many recent years and should be considered when planning counts to document bird populations over extended areas. Migration has become a much more patchy or spotty event than it was even 20 years ago. Counts are highly dependent on where you go and when. Personally, I had days with very high thrush counts on the ground in Hamlin Beach SP, yet when I stopped by the local passerine banding station, about the same distance off the Lake Ontario shore only 12 miles east, I found they had banded very few or NONE, and in walking the net lanes heard no calls from the surrounding woods and brush. Other days, we closely matched either high or low counts and banding. If trying to document usage of habitat, what you count will be highly dependent on the precise weather conditions prior to

and during a count visit. Counts done at different times of day or on different days at the same or different sites may vary more due to these factors (as well as observer variability) than due to actual population or habitat description factors. This adds much complexity to serious project planning and data analysis.

American Pipit was well reported in all Regions. Bohemian Waxwing arrived in small numbers in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7, with maxima in single flocks of 75+ in Region 2 and 55 in Region 7. Cedar Waxwing was noted in only moderate numbers through the season. Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting (note the change in location in taxonomic order) arrived at typical fall dates. Snow Bunting was observed in good numbers by season's end.

Warblers epitomized the "good over an extended period" assessment of the migration. There are many notes of "late" attached to warbler departure dates, especially in Region 10. Golden-winged Warbler, a species of special concern, was noted in Regions 3, 8, and 9 and to a State Record Late date of 29 October in Region 9. There was a rare fall report of a "Lawrence's" Warbler in Region 3. Orange-crowned Warbler was noted in all Regions reporting, with an excellent 50+ reports. Yellow-throated Warbler was found in Regions 5 and 10. Prairie Warbler, a scarce report in the fall, was seen in four Regions, to 20 November in Region 1; Prothonotary in Regions 5 and 10, to a State Record Late 28 October in the latter; and Connecticut Warbler was noted in Regions 1, 2, 3, 6, and 10, at a Regional late date of 16 October in Region 2 and tying the statewide late date of 30 October in Region 10. Yellow-breasted Chat was found in Regions 6, 8, 9, and 10, with 15 reports in the latter. In Region 7, there was a report of a possible Nashville x Black-throated Blue Warbler hybrid.

Sparrow reports were generally typical of the season. American Tree Sparrow arrived across the State mostly in October, a few lingering Clay-colored Sparrows were found, an early "Ipswich" Sparrow arrived in Region 10 on 18 October, Lark Sparrow appeared as a rarity in Region 1 and with four reports in Region 10, and White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows were both reported in good numbers, though decreasing by season's end.

Among the blackbirds, we find a Regional record late Bobolink in Region 2, a Brewer's Blackbird in Region 10, Yellow-headed Blackbird in Region 5, a very late Orchard Oriole to 15 November in Region 10, and November Baltimore Oriole records in four Regions.

Winter finches were noted scattered across the State, but usually in only very small numbers. There was only a single report of Pine Grosbeak in Region 2, Purple Finch was noted as "good" in six Regions, both crossbills were seen in small numbers—Red in five Regions and White-winged in nine Regions, Pine Siskin was well reported, and Evening Grosbeak appeared in small numbers in eight Regions, with a maximum 40 in Region 7.

TRENDS AND SPECIES OF SPECIAL INTEREST

Snow Goose: back to lower counts, at least through season's end.

Cattle Egret: Another major continuing trend was the late season occurrence of Cattle Egret, with individuals in six Regions mainly in late October into early

November and with a maximum of 17 in one flock over Region 3 and 10 reports totaling around 25 birds in Region 10.

Sandhill Crane: A relatively new breeding species in the State, with increasing reports for some time. This season birds were found in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7, with intriguing reports in Regions 6 and 7 suggesting pairs present all summer and possible breeding this year or even in the past. The species persisted through season's end in at least two Regions.

Common Nighthawk: Low to very low numbers everywhere, with no maxima above a 24 reported in Region 9.

Dickcissel: reports from six Regions, typically 1-2 records, but 12 reports from Region 10. This is another case where the flight call is easy to learn and many of the reports are flyover birds.

Rusty Blackbird: A species of special concern due to steep population decline, but noted in all Regions this fall, with a maximum of 1800 in Region 1.

BIRD OF THE SEASON

I have sometimes focused a good deal of attention on this section, but this report is long and rarities are already highlighted in bold type in the regional report introductions and all caps in the species sections. So just a look at the rarest here: From Region 1—California Gull for the 18th of the last 19 years, a Ruff, and a seventh Regional record Lark Sparrow; Region 2—a first Regional and fifth State record Lewis's Woodpecker, a third Regional Gray Kingbird, and two Bicknell's Thrushes banded; Region 3—an imm. Purple Gallinule and a Ruff; Region 5—an imm. Mississippi Kite; Region 7—Long-tailed Jaeger; Region 8—Rufous Hummingbird; Region 9—photos of dark morph Red-tailed Hawk over a hawkwatch; and Region 10—Black-capped Petrel, White-faced Storm-Petrel, a second State record Band-rumped Storm-Petrel, Magnificent Frigatebird, two White-winged Doves, Loggerhead Shrike, Bicknell's Thrush, Varied Thrush, and Brewer's Blackbird. Given all the really great rarities this fall, choosing a BOTS Award record was difficult, but my choice goes to the State First Record **Common Ground-Dove** in Region 10.

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CORRIGENDUM

Due to a printing error, Table 1 in Doug Gochfeld's article, "Predictions of species to be added to the New York State Checklist—v. 4.0" was truncated on page 307 of Volume 60. A corrected version of this table, formatted to the page size of *The Kingbird*, is available for download at: <http://www.nybirds.org/Publications/kingbird.htm>. Hard copies of the corrected table are also available from Shaibal S. Mitra, Biology Department, College of Staten Island, Staten Island, NY 10314.