

REGION 3—FINGER LAKES

Tom Johnson

150 Triphammer Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850

tbj4@cornell.edu

Weather metrics were fairly typical during this fall migration season. Average temperatures during September, October, and November were very close to the long term averages for those months. Though rainfall in September and November was close to the long term average, 3.34" in September and 3.10" in November, October was way off the charts with a 7.02" total, 3.78" of that on the 1st of that month. Overall, October more than doubled its normal precipitation total of 3.23" this year. No snow was recorded during the fall season. Weather data used in this report come from the Northeast Regional Climate Center at Cornell University at:
<http://www.nrcc.cornell.edu/climate/ithaca/index.html>.

The unusual part of the weather story that doesn't necessarily come out in a brief look at temperature and precipitation is the strong pattern of back-to-back cold fronts and accompanying northwest winds this fall. Perhaps due in part to this train of fronts, birders across eastern North America will remember this season for its interesting migration phenomena and high volume of rarities.

This fall was a season full of top-notch rarities in the Region. Headliners include King Eiders, Pacific Loon, Little Blue Heron, “Western” Red-tailed Hawk, Cattle Egrets, Purple Gallinule, Ruff, Red Knot, Little Gull, and Franklin’s Gull.

Overall, reports of uncommon waterfowl were down this season, though all of the expected species were reported, including Cackling, Ross’s, and Greater White-fronted Geese. Reports of Eurasian Wigeon in particular were down this fall, with one at Montezuma NWR on 9 October. Typically, several are found during fall migration in the Montezuma area, though spring, especially March, is the peak time for the species here.

Amazingly, two King Eiders were found this season. An apparent first cycle male stayed at Seneca Lake State Park 12-16 November. The other was a second cycle, or possibly older, male that appeared at Myers Point, Lansing during this season and lingered into the winter quarter, providing close studies for many excited birders. There wasn’t a wider pattern of inland King Eiders that seemed unusual this year; I think the occurrence of these two birds in the same season was just a matter of coincidence.

Seemingly an annual occurrence in the Region now, **Pacific Loon** was reported twice this season on Cayuga Lake along with strong numbers of Common Loons. It is unclear if the two reports refer to the same individual, especially since multiple individuals of this species have been documented in previous years. Two reports of **Eared Grebe** came from Stewart Park, Ithaca this season, almost a month apart. I see no reason why these didn’t represent two different migrant individuals, especially since Stewart Park is one of the best-covered birding locations anywhere, and it seems unlikely for one to go unreported for such a long interval. A very nice report from the western part of the Region, an Eared Grebe was seen at Branchport on Keuka Lake on 18 September.

Fitting in with a major flight of **Cattle Egrets** to the north of their normal range this fall, a **flock of 17** was observed flying around Ithaca on 27 October. Other rare waders this season included a juvenile **Little Blue Heron** and an unidentified *plegadis* ibis (Glossy/ White-faced) at Montezuma NWR.

One of the rarest birds found in the Region this fall was certainly the **dark morph “Western” Red-tailed Hawk** seen by multiple observers and photographed by Chris Wood in Ovid. Though dark morph Red-tailed Hawks are reported nearly annually in New York, it is quite rare for supporting documentation to surface.

Montezuma NWR and its birders were simply on fire this fall. Regular coverage of the Main Pool, Tscache Pool, Mays Point Pool, and Knox-Marcellus Marsh produced lots of interesting records, including several truly rare birds for the Region. Kevin McGowan found and photographed a first cycle **Purple Gallinule** in dense vegetation along the auto loop. Although this bird proved very difficult to relocate, the same habitat proved to be highly beneficial for other migrant rallids, including Common Moorhen, Virginia Rail, and Sora. The Knox-Marcellus impoundments continued to be great bird attractors following the summer’s draw-down. While overall numbers of shorebirds decreased

substantially from the bonanza of July and August, diversity increased and several rare shorebirds were found. A juvenile **Ruff** and a Red Knot found on 6 September were the major highlights and were nicely photographed. Additionally, a **Franklin's Gull** was a great discovery on 8 September while observers were following up on the Ruff and Red Knot finds of two days prior!

Landbird reports this season were strong as usual, but did not include nearly as many rarities as the non-passerine list. Observers found lots of the uncommon migrants, including a strong tally of four Connecticut Warblers. The paucity of fall Connecticut Warbler reports from the Finger Lakes has surprised me over the past five years, with only one or two reports typical each year. I think this is more related to the species' secretive nature and the vast amounts of appropriate stopover habitat in the Region rather than to any actual distribution anomaly.

The nights of 8-9 September and 10-11 September marked two of the heaviest nocturnal flights during this fall's migration. Many observers noted a big thrush flight, with smaller numbers of warblers and sparrows moving as well.

Several late landbirds were discovered this fall. Chris Wood found a Black-billed Cuckoo on 7 October at Hog Hole, Ithaca. Tim Lenz photographed a Purple Martin on 26 September at MNWR; this is the latest Regional date recorded for the species in eBird. Finally, on 12 November, France Dewaghe discovered a Baltimore Oriole at Sapsucker Woods in Ithaca/ Dryden.

Finches were lightly represented, but all expected species were found. A minor Pine Siskin flight developed, with birds arriving in the end of September and building through October and November.

Data and sightings compiled in this report are derived from two main sources, the Cayugabirds-L email listserv and eBird, but are really the product of lots of great birders who are excited about sharing information and sightings about the Region's birds.

Because I am not currently living and birding in the Finger Lakes Region, this will be my last report as Regional Editor, at least for now. I would like to thank all of the wonderful birders and ornithologists that I have met and been privileged to know over the last five years, including those in the fantastic community that surrounds Cornell University and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jessie Barry, Shawn Billerman, Chris Dalton, France Dewaghe, Benjamin Freeman, Jeff Gerbracht, Chuck Gibson, Jane Graves, John Greenly, John and Sue Gregoire, Bob Guthrie, Wes Hochachka, Marshall Iliff, Andy Johnson, Anne Marie Johnson, Steve Kelling, David Kennedy, Gary Kohlenberg, Martjan Lammertink, Leona Lauster, Tim Lenz, Bob McGuire, Matt Medler, Ann Mitchell, Ed Norman, David Nicosia, Dave Nutter (DN), Bruce Packard, Jay Powell, Tom Schulenberg, Carolyn Sedgwick, Nathan Senner, Brian Sullivan, Joann Tetlow, Mike Tetlow, Chris Wood (CLW), Matt Young.

ABBREVIATIONS

MNWR – Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; MyPt – Myers Point; StP – Stewart Park, Ithaca; SSF – Summerhill State Forest; and SSW – Sapsucker Woods.

WHISTLING-DUCKS – VULTURES

Trumpeter Swan: MNWR thru; max 18 Lower Lake Rd, Cayuga Lake (DK).

Greater White-fronted Goose: arr & max 8 MNWR 8 Oct (M&JT); Dryden Lake 2 Nov (AMJ).

Ross's Goose: arr MNWR 8 Oct (M&JT); max 4 MNWR 10 Oct (TL).

Snow Goose: max 4500 MNWR (eBird).

Cackling Goose: max 6 MNWR 2 Oct (CLW).

Eurasian Wigeon: Tschache Pool MNWR 9 Oct (CLW, JB).

KING EIDER: Seneca Lake SP 12-16 Nov; Myers 24 Nov thru (CLW, BM).

PACIFIC LOON: Deans Cove 10 Oct (TL); Sheldrake Point 31 Oct (TL).

Com. Loon: max 1290 Cayuga Lake (eBird).

Eared Grebe: StP 22 Sep (TL); StP 17 Oct (BF); Branchport 18 Sep (EN, BG).

Great Egret: Etna 5 Sep (BP); Dryden Lake 9 Sep (JMc).

LITTLE BLUE HERON: MNWR 4-29 Sep (JMc, mob); Myers 6 Sep (CLW).

CATTLE EGRET: 17 Ithaca 27 Oct (TL, CD).

plegadis sp: MNWR 1-20 Sep

HAWKS – ALCIDS

“WESTERN” RED-TAILED HAWK: dark morph Ovid 21 Nov (CLW, JB, CS, ML).

PURPLE GALLINULE: juv MNWR Main Pool 16 Oct (KMc).

Sandhill Crane: MNWR thru.

Hudsonian Godwit: MNWR 4-27 Oct (DN).

RUFF: Knox-Marcellus MNWR 6-14 Sep (TL).

RED KNOT: Knox-Marcellus MNWR 6-11 Sep (TL).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: max 3 Knox-Marcellus MNWR 11 Sep (AJ, TL, MM, JMc).

Long-billed Dowitcher: max 17 Mays Point MNWR 26 Sep (TL).

Wilson's Phalarope: Mays Point MNWR 9-10 Sep (JG, KMc); Knox-Marcellus MNWR 14 Sep (JP).

Red-necked Phalarope: max 10 Knox-Marcellus MNWR 10 Sep (JMc); StP 21 Oct (DN).

Little Gull: 1st cycle MyPt 14 Oct (JGr).

FRANKLIN'S GULL: Knox-Marcellus 8 Sep (MI, TL).

Iceland Gull: arr StP 28 Nov (TL).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: Dryden 26 Sep (TL).

Glaucous Gull: arr StP 28 Nov (TL).

PIGEONS – WOODPECKERS

Black-billed Cuckoo: 7 Oct Hog Hole Ithaca (CLW), late.

Short-eared Owl: max 13 Cayuga Lake Basin 28 Nov (SF).

FLYCATCHERS – WAXWINGS

Purple Martin: late Tschache Pool MNWR 26 Sep (TL).

Bohemian Waxwing: SSW 2-17 Nov (TL).

LONGSPURS – WARBLERS

Golden-winged Warbler: Monkey Run 5 Sep (CLW).

“Lawrences” Warbler: Ellis Hollow 1 Sep (JMc).

Orange-crowned Warbler: Hog Hole Ithaca 7 Oct (CLW).

CONNECTICUT WARBLER: Caroline 13 Sep (JG); Ithaca 26 Sep (NS); Myers 2 Oct (CLW); Aurora 2 Oct (TL, CLW).

TOWHEES – WEAVERS

Dickcissel: Myers 14 Sep (CLW).

Clay-colored Sparrow: Ithaca 14 Sep (JMc); Ithaca 17 Oct (NS).

Nelson's Sparrow: arr Hog Hole Ithaca 7 Oct (CLW).

Baltimore Oriole: SSW 12 Nov (FD), late.

Red Crossbill: 5 Ithaca 10 Nov (NS); 6 Caroline 22 Oct (SK).

White-winged Crossbill: SSW 10 Nov (WH); Monkey Run, Dryden 18 Nov (CLW).

Com. Redpoll: Cornell Plantations 29 Nov (CLW, JB, BS, MI).

Pine Siskin: 3rd week Sep thru; max 55 1 Nov (eBird).

Evening Grosbeak: arr SSF 25 Oct (MY).

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