

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON – SUMMER 2012

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As usual, a complex, potentially interesting, and typically under-reported season. This leaves us with lots of records covering parts of two migrations and the bulk of the breeding season, but with significant difficulty in analysis. This season many observers are away on vacation. Others are focused on research projects, the results of which are often inaccessible to the Regional editors by season's end, if at all. The data from few MAPS stations or BBS routes seem to make it to these summaries. We now have on the order of 300,000 eBird records for this season—many more for spring and fall. This is now 80% or more of the input for some Regions. However, working through the data is time consuming (see a note at the end of the Region 2 report introduction). Dave Wheeler, one of the new Region 5 editors, has developed a tool available to all Regional editors to help with this. On the bright side, looking at the data in various ways and trying to put it into historical perspective is one way to make the data gathering useful. The approach to this season will again be as late spring migration, the breeding season and summering birds, and the start of fall migration, with rarities added on at the end.

The Region 10 report was late enough and my schedule such that I must exercise my discretionary option as season highlights editor to overlook it in this report. Since the Region 10 report is usually very well written and the Region enough different from the rest of the State to be difficult to integrate into this summary anyway, I'll refer the reader to the Region 10 report for information from there this season.

WEATHER

This summer's weather is relatively easy to summarize. It was generally warm and dry over the whole State, reaching moderate drought conditions in some Regions. There were scattered, short cool periods and bursts of rainfall, especially in local afternoon thunderstorms, but no major weather events. Additional thoughts by Regional editors included likely good waterfowl and ground-nester production due to conditions, but with data lacking, in Region 6; low snowfall and the dry spring and summer translating to few berries and little mast as food in Region 7; and Bob Yunick noting low numbers of car-insect collisions as a measure of lack of insect prey in Region 8.

TAIL END OF SPRING MIGRATION

Early June always sees the last of the spring migrants. With the early warmth in March and an apparent shift to many early arrivals, one might expect some effects on the late end; but only a maybe so. There were still the usual late waterbirds, with Snow Geese in Regions 5, 6, & 7; Greater Scaup in Regions 2 & 5; Red-throated Loon in the Regions bordering Lake Ontario, plus Region 9; a few Common Loons in all Regions; and Horned Grebe in Regions 2 & 7. The tail end of the spring raptors included numbers of Bald Eagles and Broad-winged Hawks near Braddock Bay and Derby Hill, a very late Swainson's Hawk passing Derby Hill on 18 June, and a late Rough-legged Hawk in Wayne County in Region 2 on 11 June. At least 12 species of migrant shorebirds were reported in multiple Regions into June, with the more interesting being: 15 White-rumped Sandpipers in Region 1 to the second of June, three Dunlin to 10 June in Region 5, and Wilson's Phalarope in Regions 1 & 3. Among the gulls and terns, only Little Gull in Regions 1 & 7 and Common Tern to 21 June in Region 2 were somewhat unusual. Among the passerines, nearly all were the expected late migrants: Olive-sided and Yellow-bellied Flycatchers; Swainson's Thrush, but no Gray-cheeked Thrush; nine species of warblers, with a record late Palm Warbler on 15 June in Region 2 the most unusual; White-throated Sparrow in Regions 1, 2, & 8 and White-crowned Sparrow in Regions 2 & 7; and surprising finches, with Red Crossbill in Region 8, 48 White-winged Crossbills on 6 June in Region 2, Pine Siskins lingering in five Regions, and Evening Grosbeak in June in Regions 6, 8, & 9.

BREEDING SEASON

Without an Atlas project to push many into the field, reporting is sparse. Still we do have quite a bit covered in the Regional reports. Among the waterfowl, Trumpeter Swan continues to spread as a breeder (or potential breeder), with a pair near Oak Orchard WMA all summer in Region 1, the usual nesting pairs in the Montezuma complex and nearby in Regions 2 & 3, four adults but no juveniles in Region 6, and a first confirmed breeding with five young fledged in Region 5 near Volney. Wood Duck and Pied-billed Grebe were good in several Regions each; a female Common Merganser was reported with a brood north of the Atlas limit in Region 2; but on the downside, little note of either Am. Black Duck or Blue-winged Teal, both species of concern. One of the best-reported groups is colonial waterbirds, with much detail, especially in the Region 1 & 6 reports. In summary: Double-crested Cormorant numbers were down a bit (possibly due to control efforts); Great Egret nest counts were up in Region 1, also with a summer high tally of 340 individuals feeding at the Iroquois NWR and birds reported in all other Regions; Black-crowned Night-Heron nest counts up in Regions 1 & 6; Ring-billed Gull counts flat and Herring Gull up since the previous five-year interval count; Caspian Terns record high in Region 6; and Common Tern record high in Region 1 and very high in Region 6. On the other

The Kingbird 2012 December; 62 (4)

hand, Black Terns seem to be just holding on in known breeding areas, with only a slight increase in wandering individuals seen on Lake Ontario. Additional counts or group summaries include: a Purple Martin study near the Iroquois NWR complex in Region 1; some good breeding warbler counts in Region 4; good notes on the Blue-winged/Golden-winged Warbler situation in Region 6; and pretty much bad news for grassland birds everywhere, but especially in one of their last strongholds in Region 6.

Beyond these studies and summaries, we can just wander through the checklist and pick up other breeding bird observations of interest. Black Vulture continues to increase, with behavior suggesting breeding imminent in Region 1. Among the raptors, N. Goshawk and Red-shouldered Hawk reports remain few, and breeding (or likely breeding) reports for Merlin and Peregrine Falcon stable. Sandhill Crane presence in Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, & 6 suggests more nesting imminent or occurring, though actual evidence is still confined to the Montezuma complex and very likely Region 2 north of Honeoye, where three cranes were seen from late summer on, but with no convincing photos or notes establishing the third as a young of the year. Common Nighthawk and E. Whip-poor-will appear to be concentrated in Regions 7, 8, & 9 and nearly absent in the western Regions during the breeding season. All Regions except Region 7 reported Red-headed Woodpecker, some with good numbers, such as Regions 1, 2, & 6. Potential breeding reports for White-eyed Vireo upstate are few, so one in Region 3 this summer is interesting. With Fish Crow we add a new location in Region 5 and multiple birds again all summer in Region 2, but no confirmation of nesting. There is an interesting story of a snake invading a Bank Swallow colony in Region 4. Nesting Sedge Wrens have become scarce, but we have two new locations in Region 1, though tempered by fewer sites in Region 6. Bicknell's Thrush is reported doing fairly well in Regions 7, 8, & 9. Among the warblers we find: Worm-eating Warbler in Regions 8 & 9; Prothonotary Warbler sites noted in Regions 1, adjacent areas in 2 & 3, & 5; seven reports of Kentucky Warbler; Yellow-throated warbler noted only in the usual breeding spot in Region 1; and only one July report of Yellow-breasted Chat in Region 1. Among the sparrows, we see Clay-colored Sparrow nesting in five Regions, Grasshopper Sparrow holding on all right in five Regions, but Henslow's Sparrow only in Region 6 and very few there. But here I can also illustrate the reporting problem alluded to earlier. Vesper Sparrow is flagged as one of the problem "grassland" species but is only noted at all in four Regional reports, with a maximum of 22 in Region 6. Yet I personally tallied 49 on a BBS route in Region 3 and over the past 37 years doing that route have averaged 30.1 ± 14.9 , with a maximum of 66 in 2007. So there are issues regarding forgetting to pass along route data at season's end, eBird entry as a major extra data entry process, comparisons requiring knowledge of area and time not always supplied, and decisions on what is interesting enough to include in individual Regional reports. We can end this section with a breeding rarity—several individuals seen and at least one pair of Dickcissels confirmed nesting in Region 3.

START OF FALL MIGRATION

Another messy picture, with at least some fuzziness in assigning arrival dates as fall migrants for birds that commonly breed. I currently remain of the opinion that, by noting locations and numbers, one can do this for most species in most Regions. Most Regional editors seem to concur. This fall by far the bulk of the data is for birds “detected” as migrants at typical dates and in typical numbers, as expected. The focus will be on outliers and quick summaries of the rest. Back to the top of the checklist, we find Snow Goose early in Region 7; N. Shoveler and N. Pintail in several Regions by the end of August; an early Redhead in Region 1; White-winged Scoter in Regions 1, 2, 5, & 6 (16 in Region 6); and Red-necked Grebe in Region 2 on 28 July and several additional times in August. There are a few peak counts for the late summer hawk movement along the south shore of Lake Ontario from Braddock Bay and Derby Hill and note of Merlin and Peregrine Falcon numbers picking up at shorebird gathering sites. With dryness and much exposed habitat, there was hope of increased shorebirds, but this turned out not to be the reality in most places. However, there were some good counts and diversity. Among the new arrivals, we had two species in June, including a Regional record early Semipalmated Plover on 25 June in Region 2, 19 species in July, and one more species added in August. The more interesting records include: Willet in four Regions (sometimes indicated as Eastern or Western), with maxima four in Region 2, seven in Region 3, and four in Region 9; Whimbrel in five Regions; Red Knot only in Regions 2 & 5; Sanderling numbers low; a lone Western Sandpiper in Region 8; Buff-breasted Sandpiper in Regions 3 & 5; Wilson’s Phalarope in Region 3; and Red-necked Phalarope in at least six Regions, with maxima of six in Region 3, and 11 in Region 5 on 26 July. Gulls and terns were generally noted in relatively low numbers for this part of their migration.

Among the passerines we again find most of the species arriving as expected in August, with maybe a few more a bit early relative to prior recent years. Among the more interesting comments and reports are: most swallows, if reported at all, were at low maxima—only 1109 Purple Martins in Region 1 and and just one Tree Swallow count over 1000, in Region 9; Ruby-crowned Kinglet early in Regions 2 & 9; Gray-cheeked Thrush Regionally record early in Region 1; Swainson’s Thrush very early in Region 2, where birds were banded on 23 & 29 July & 14 August, and appeared by mid-August in Regions 4, 5, & 6; Magnolia Warbler and Cape May Warbler at Regional record early dates in Region 2; a Kentucky Warbler in Region 3; Connecticut Warbler banded on 28 August in Region 2 and seen 22-24 August in Region 8; and Yellow-breasted Chats banded on 12, 14, & 22 August in Region 2, though no other reports have been received for the species in the Region this year.

White-throated Sparrow returned early in Regions 1 & 2, two Dickcissels were noted flying over the lakewatch in Region 2 in August, and an amazing 2,500 Bobolinks were tallied in Region 3 on 23 August. We also had a taste of irruptions hopefully to come with: several Regional editors noting Red-breasted Nuthatch movements, Red Crossbills in seven Regions, a few White-winged

Crossbills, Pine Siskins in all Regions, and a few Evening Grosbeaks in five Regions.

RARITIES

This summer saw a good collection of rarities found, though a few are only Regionally or seasonally rare. Among the waterfowl we have only Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in Region 6, Greater White-fronted Goose seasonally rare in Region 5, and Eurasian Wigeon in Region 9. Both American White Pelican and Brown Pelican appeared in Region 1. Two Great Cormorants in Region 2 were a first June Regional record for the species. Among the herons and egrets we have Little Blue Heron in Regions 1, 2, & 3; Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in Region 3; and a second Regional White-faced Ibis in Region 1. Black Vulture is likely expanding breeding in the State, but was Regionally rare in Regions 1 & 2. Mississippi Kite in Region 9 and Swainson's Hawk in Region 5 top the raptors. Among the shorebirds, American Avocet, Curlew Sandpiper, and Ruff were noted in Region 3, another American Avocet in Region 9, and a Western Sandpiper in Region 8. Rarer gulls and terns included: seasonally rare Black-headed Gull in Region 1 and Little Gull in Region 7, Laughing Gull in Region 2, Franklin's Gull in Region 1, and a first Regional record of Sandwich Tern in Region 5. Passerine rarities were few, with the best being now rare Loggerhead Shrikes on 13 June and 5 July in Region 2, seasonally rare White-eyed Vireo and Kentucky Warbler in Region 3; Blue Grosbeak in Region 9, and Dickcissel in Regions 2, 3 (nesting), and 5.

For bird of the season, I'll fall back to the main emphasis on the breeding season and go with the State's first mid-summer record of Fox Sparrow in Region 7.

