

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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The summer was warm and a little dry. In Watertown, all three months were at least 2° F warmer than average, with the greatest departure from normal coming in July, which was 3.8° above normal. Precipitation was 0.7" and 0.9" below average for June and July, respectively, but August is usually the wettest month of the summer, and the 3.8" of rain that fell this August was within 0.1" of normal.

For the most part waterfowl were present in typical numbers, but there were a few unusual species. At least four adult Trumpeter Swans were at Perch River throughout the summer, but for the first time in many years no juveniles were detected. Also at Perch River was a single Snow Goose on 2 June, the last of a series of late individual Snow Geese in Region 6. Also unusual for summer were two groups of White-winged Scoters on the St. Lawrence River, including an amazing 16 at Barnhart Island on 11 August. Two adult female Common Goldeneye in Waddington on 26 August were likely from the small New York/southern Ontario breeding population, as this date is at least 6-8 weeks early for northern migrants.

The only true rarity of the summer was a **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** that Bill Munro observed on the St. Lawrence River in Clayton on 19 July. Bill soon learned that the whistling-duck was visiting a house along the shore where it was joining a group of Mallards being fed grain twice daily. Apparently the whistling-duck first showed up in early July and was present for the rest of the summer, although I am aware of no birders that looked for it after the beginning of August. The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was very tame, allowing close approach, but its apparent arrival date coincided with a number of other reports from the northeastern United States, suggesting a similar origin.

This spring and summer were the first in several years that were not cool and wet, and the dry conditions seemed to result in good reproduction for waterfowl and early ground-nesting birds. Good productivity data are lacking for species such as Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock, but anecdotal observations suggested that reproduction was relatively good. On 9 June Chris Wood saw a Gray Partridge on Dog Hill Road at the edge of Perch River WMA, where there have been no reports in many years. In fact there have been no Gray Partridge reports in Region 6 during the past 5-6 years, and this species was thought to be extirpated from the Region. For these reasons, the Perch River partridge is probably a recent release or escapee.

Exceptional counts were made for several species of colonial water birds, mostly by New York State Department of Environmental Conservation biologists. The official nest count for Double-crested Cormorants on Little Galloo Island was 1,631, which is the lowest count since 1986, reflecting the results of continued cormorant-control measures. In contrast, the 2,332 Caspian

Tern nests is a record high count for Little Galloo Island and for New York, exceeding the previous high count set last year by about 400 nests. More Herring Gull nests were also counted on the island compared with recent years, but the Ring-billed Gull nest count was within the range of past years. Common Terns also had a banner year, with 1,394 nests on the St. Lawrence River, representing continuing increases in response to management funded by the New York Power Authority.

Sandhill Cranes were observed throughout the summer in and near Lakeview WMA in Jefferson County and the Lisbon Swamp in St. Lawrence County, where they have been suspected to nest for several years. As has generally been the case, no young were observed, nor was nesting documented. During mid-summer cranes were reported by many non-birders in Canton near Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, but it is not clear if these are different birds from those seen at Lisbon Swamp.

For the past decade or so local birders have come up with a variety of explanations for the substantial decline in migrant shorebird numbers and diversity along the Lake Ontario shoreline in Jefferson County. Among the most frequently cited explanations has been management for high water levels for recreational boating and power generation, leaving little shorebird habitat exposed during summer and early fall. With this in mind, unusually low water levels on Lake Ontario this summer had area birders anticipating an improvement in the local shorebirding. On 10 July David Wheeler and Jim Tarolli visited El Dorado where a nice assortment of migrants included five Sanderling still in breeding plumage, a sight rarely seen in Region 6, contributing to the sense that this was going to be a good year. Unfortunately, shorebird numbers were not any higher than they have been in recent years, and many visits to El Dorado in particular turned up very few individuals, although diversity was marginally better than the 10-year average. Notable shorebirds included a Ruddy Turnstone on a concrete navigation cell in the St. Lawrence River in early June and two Whimbrel, two Baird's Sandpipers, and four Red-necked Phalaropes in August, all at El Dorado except for one of the phalaropes, which was at the Canton sewage ponds.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo numbers finally appear to be returning to historically typical levels, many years after the end of a tent caterpillar outbreak resulted in a region-wide population spike. Still, the five reports from this summer would have been deemed exceptional 10 years ago. Black-billed Cuckoo numbers were higher than last summer, but still seemed lower than most years. Jacob Berl, a graduate student studying Red-headed Woodpeckers on Fort Drum, found 15 territories that seemed to represent 14 pairs and one unpaired male.

It was another poor year for grassland birds in Region 6. Four or five pairs of Upland Sandpipers on Fort Drum were more than have been seen on the installation for the past few years, but there was only one report away from Fort Drum. It was also a down year for Sedge Wrens, with seven individuals reported from three locations. Henslow's Sparrows were barely present this summer, with no more than two individuals each at Fort Drum and Perch River. The eventual

disappearance of Henslow's Sparrow from Region 6 and New York seems increasingly inevitable without a large-scale effort to manage habitat for this species.

Surveys on Fort Drum show an accelerating increase in Blue-winged Warbler numbers, with Golden-winged Warblers accounting for a decreasing percentage of the total "winged warbler" population. These surveys also indicated that for the first time, Blue-winged Warblers clearly outnumbered Golden-wings on Fort Drum. In contrast, just a few miles north of Fort Drum, Steve Kelling and Brian Sullivan found 19 Golden-winged Warblers and no Blue-winged Warblers in the Indian River Lakes area of northern Jefferson County.

Other passerines of note include a rare August Louisiana Waterthrush on Fort Drum and three Orchard Orioles, of which two were territorial males and one a migrant. Pine Siskins were reported from all portions of Region 6, but White-winged Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks were largely or entirely restricted to the Adirondacks and Tug Hill.

For the season I received reports of 204 species, tying a modern record high set in 2011. The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was the clear highlight of the summer, although to some its lack of wariness was a little disconcerting. After early promise, the shorebird migration was disappointing, but the summer's biggest disappointment was the continuing decline in numbers of Upland Sandpipers and Henslow's Sparrows.

CONTRIBUTORS

Alan Belford, Jacob Berl, Jeff Bolsinger, Tom Burke, Richard & Marion Brouse, Bernie Carr, Carol Cady, Bernie Carr, Anthony Collerton, Joan Collins, Martha Collins, Wayne Fidler, Louise Gomez, Lee Harper, Steve Kelling, Greg Lawrence, Nick Leone, Patricia Lindsay, Bill Munro, Bill Purcell, Shai Mitra, Robert Scranton, Thomas Smith, Brian Sullivan, Jim Tarolli, Paul Thut, David Wheeler, Tom & Eileen Wheeler, Chris Wood, Hans & Madeline van der Zweep, Benjamin Van Doren.

ABBREVIATIONS

BI – Barnhart Island, T Massena; CWF – Canton wastewater facility; ED – El Dorado Shores Preserve, T Ellisburg; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; LWMA – Lakeview WMA, T Ellisburg; MM – Massawepie Mire, T's Piercefield and Colton; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; PtPen – Pt. Peninsula; SLGW – St. Lawrence Grasslands & Wetlands Management District refuge and headquarters, T Dekalb; SLR – St. Lawrence River; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WS – Winthrop Swamp, T Stockholm.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK: 19 Jul thru (mob, reports to NYSARC), *intro*.

Snow Goose: PRWMA 2 Jun (AC, BvD).

Trumpeter Swan: At least 4 ad but no reports of y PRWMA thru; 2 ULLWMA thru.

Wood Duck: max 265 WHWMA 2 Aug.
Am. Black Duck: max 22 WHWMA 18 Aug.
Blue-winged Teal: 2 PRWMA 2 Jun & 2 T Copenhagen 7 Jun, only reports before mid-Jul; max 85 SLGW 31 Aug.
N. Shoveler: WHWMA 4 Jun, only report before Aug; 1-2/day CWF 17 Aug thru.
N. Pintail: WHWMA 18 Aug, only report.
Green-winged Teal: only 1 report before late Jul; max 35 SLGW 31 Aug.
Redhead: BI 27 Jun, only report before Aug; max 133 WHWMA 29 Aug.
Ring-necked Duck: max 47 ULLWMA 25 Aug.
Lesser Scaup: 2 PRWMA 27 Jul; 2 WHWMA 15 Aug.
White-winged Scoter: 3 imm SLR Clayton 23 Jul; 16 BI 11 Aug, an exceptional tally for summer (HvZ).
Com. Goldeneye: 2 SLR Waddington 26-28 Aug.
Com. Merganser: max 26 ED 15 Jul.
Red-breasted Merganser: 4 SLR Massena 25 Jul, only report.
Gray Partridge: PRWMA 9 Jun (CW), no reports from this location in many years, suggesting recent release or escape.
Ruffed Grouse: dry weather during nesting season appeared to result in better reproduction than previous 2 yrs.
Wild Turkey: seemed to be more abundant than recent years.
Com. Loon: max 12 Chippewa Bay 15 Aug.
Pied-billed Grebe: high counts incl: 79 WHWMA 2 Aug; 41 Allen Pool PRWMA 19 Aug; 86 Lower Lake ULLWMA 25 Aug.
Double-crested Cormorant: 1631 nests LGI.
Am. Bittern: max 11 Ashland Flats WMA 11 Aug.
Least Bittern: rep from PRWMA, WHWMA & FD.
Great Blue Heron: 5 rookeries FD, the largest with 22 successful nests.
Great Egret: max 58 WS 3 Aug.
Black-crowned Night-Heron: max 44 nests Gull Is.
Turkey Vulture: max 43 ED 19 Aug.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Osprey: max 15 Alexandria Bay 17 Jun.
N. Goshawk: juv in nest T Stockholm 3 Jun.
Broad-winged Hawk: max 17 FD 5 Jun.
Com. Gallinule: 12 Kring Pt. Rd. T Alexandria 9 Aug; 13 Stone Mills Pool PRWMA 19 Aug; high counts.
Am. Coot: PRWMA 2-9 Jun, rare in summer.
Sandhill Crane: multiple reports of suspected nesting prs LWMA & Lisbon Swamp, where nesting strongly suspected recent years; multiple

reports pr Canton near ULLWMA Jul & Aug but not clear whether new pr or same as Lisbon Swamp birds. No indication of successful nesting from any site.

Black-bellied Plover: last ED 10 Jun; arr PtPen 16 Aug; max 9 PtPen 28 Aug.
Am. Golden-Plover: FD 29 Aug.
Semipalmated Plover: arr ED 15 Jul; max 5 SLGW 28 Aug.
Killdeer: max 18 ED 15 Jul.
Spotted Sandpiper: max 8 ED 10 Jul & CWF 31 Jul-17 Aug.
Solitary Sandpiper: last ED 3 Jun; arr Canton 9 Jul; max 9 SLGW 25 Aug.
Greater Yellowlegs: arr ED 10 Jul; max 4 SLGW 28 Aug.
Lesser Yellowlegs: arr CWF 9 Jul; max 11 ED 21 Jul.
Upland Sandpiper: 2 Millens Bay CV 16-17 Jun; max 14 FD 17 Jul, at least 4-5 pr.
Whimbrel: 2 ED 30 Aug.
Ruddy Turnstone: on concrete navigation cell SLR Massena 2 Jun.
Sanderling: 5 arr ED 10 Jul, where 2 still present 15 Jul, only reports.
Semipalmated Sandpiper: last CWF 4 Jun; arr ED 15 Jul; max 6 LWMA 30 Jul.
Least Sandpiper: arr ED 10 Jul; max 24 LWMA 30 Jul.
Baird's Sandpiper: 2 ED 22 Aug, only report.
Pectoral Sandpiper: 3 SLGW 31 Aug, only report.
Short-billed Dowitcher: PtPen 28 Aug, only report.
Red-necked Phalarope: 3 ED 19 Aug; CWF 24-26 Aug.
Bonaparte's Gull: arr ED 18 Jul; max 6 T Henderson 20 Aug, low.
Ring-billed Gull: 43324 nests LGI.
Herring Gull: 512 nests LGI.
Com. Tern: 1394 nests SLR, all but 19 on NYS side river, modern record high.
Caspian Tern: 2332 nests LGI, record high.
Black Tern: many reports PRWMA, but reliable high count lacking; 8 incl. 1 nest Renshaw Bay T Ellisburg 3 Jun; 8 Wilson's Bay CV 17 Jun; max 48 ULLWMA 9 Jul; 3 LWMA 11 Jul.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: 5 rep; numbers lower than any year since massive tent caterpillar outbreak 2002-2005.
Black-billed Cuckoo: more than 2011, although numbers still lower than many years.
E. Screech-Owl: max 4 T Leyden 18 Jun.
Barred Owl: 4 y in single brood Cranberry Lake mid-Jul.
N. Saw-whet Owl: FD 3 Jul.

Com. Nighthawk: 5-15/day FD Jun & Jul; PRWMA 10 Jul, only Jun or Jul report away from FD; widespread migratory movement noted 23 Aug.

E. Whip-poor-will: max 35 on 10-stop survey route FD 8 Jun.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 15 terr FD thru.

Black-backed Woodpecker: multiple reports MM.

Merlin: expansion continues; reports from all portions of Region.

Peregrine Falcon: pr Long Sault Dam thru.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: max 3 T Fine 10 Jun.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: max 4 MM 8 Jul, low.

E. Kingbird: max 24 French Creek WMA 14 Aug.

Gray Jay: max 10 MM 17 Aug.

Purple Martin: max 28 T Alexandria 9 Aug.

Bank Swallow: y still in at least 2 nest holes LWMA 30 Jul.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 16 in single flock ad & juv FD 19 Jun.

Sedge Wren: 5 terr m FD incl. 3 continuing from May & 2 arr Jul (JB); ULLWMA 10 Jul (AC); LWMA 30 Jul (JB).

Marsh Wren: max 30 PRWMA 2 Jun, where a thorough survey would likely reveal many more.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: LWMA & PRWMA, only breeding reports; migrants FD 15, 17, & 22 Aug; ED 19 Aug.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: no reports away from Adirondacks or Tug Hill.

N. Mockingbird: 9+ terr FD, high; Chaumont 16 Jun, only report away from FD.

Swainson's Thrush: migrant ED 22 Aug.

Am. Pipit: 2 FD 23 Aug.

Cedar Waxwing: max 80 CWF 10 Aug.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Louisiana Waterthrush: apparent migrant FD 13 Aug, although suitable habitat within 1 mile.

Golden-winged Warbler: 19 on and after Indian River Lakes BBS route 19 Jun (SK, BS); 56 singing m on Fort Drum surveys.

Blue-winged Warbler: none on and after Indian River Lakes BBS route 19 Jun; 79 singing m on Fort Drum surveys.

Golden-winged X Blue-winged Warbler hybrid: 31 singing m on FD surveys incl 4 "Lawrence's" Warblers.

Tennessee Warbler: arr FD 21 Aug; max 15+ FD 29 Aug.

Cape May Warbler: FD 22 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: at least 4 terr Grindstone Is.

N. Parula: ED 18 Jul, only report outside Adirondacks.

Bay-breasted Warbler: ICNC 25 Aug; Five Ponds Wilderness 26 Aug; 2 FD 27 Aug.

Blackburnian Warbler: migrants FD by 15 Aug.

Blackpoll Warbler: last T Copenhagen 9 Jun; arr FD 30 Aug.

Palm Warbler: max 18 MM 8 Jul; additional breeding reports Hitchens Bog; arr ICNC 25 Aug.

Prairie Warbler: max 11 singing m FD 1 Jun.

Canada Warbler: 4-12/day in wet second growth forest FD Jun & Jul.

Wilson's Warbler: FD 28, 29 Aug.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: max 36 singing m FD 23 Jun.

Vesper Sparrow: max 22 in single group FD 13 Jul.

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 20 singing m FD 22 Jun; 8 reports from lowland areas away from FD, high for recent years.

Henslow's Sparrow: 1-2/day Dog Hill Rd PRWMA Jun & Jul; scarce FD thru; probably record low.

Lincoln's Sparrow: max 18 MM 8 Jul.

Dark-eyed Junco: FD 1 Jul, only report outside Adirondacks & Tug Hill.

Bobolink: migrants conspicuous by 23 Jul.

Orchard Oriole: terr ad m FD 8 Jun, continuing from May; 1st year m PRWMA 9 Jun; migrating WHWMA 18 Aug.

White-winged Crossbill: sev rep 1-2/day Adirondacks & Tug Hill.

Pine Siskin: scattered rep 1-2/day.

Evening Grosbeak: FD 20 Jun, only report outside Adirondacks & Tug Hill.

ADDENDUM:

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE: WHWMA 31 MAY (TL), could not be relocated.

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