

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SUMMER 2013

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The Weather

The recurrent theme regarding the weather this season was well above average precipitation, primarily in June and early July, in many Regions. This was especially pronounced in northern and eastern Regions, including Region 5, where some areas received up to 12" of rain during the month, Region 7, where June's precipitation was 200% higher than normal, and Region 8 where the precipitation was nearly six inches higher than average. The extent of rain early in the breeding season seemed to disrupt many nesting species. Conversely, this same weather likely contributed to widespread excellent fruit crops by later summer. The remainder of the summer season was less eventful; in particular, there were no tropical weather events during the period.

Breeding Birds

Several Regional reports speculated that the high precipitation in June had a detrimental effect on nesting success this summer, particularly in the hardest hit areas such as the eastern half of Region 5. There many flooded areas were inaccessible so the actual extent of losses couldn't be fully documented, although a number of monitored Common Loon and duck nests were lost. In Region 9, high water was responsible for washing out Common Gallinule nests, but it was thought to have occurred early enough in the season for re-nesting.

In Region 3, cold snaps in early June led to one of the least successful breeding seasons for a long-running Tree Swallow monitoring project. In more positive news, a small breeding colony of Henslow's Sparrows was found in Region 1, with up to seven birds present with evidence of breeding, and some welcome encouraging news in Region 6, where for the first time Henslow's were found in grasslands managed for the past several years under a landowner incentive program run by New York State. Grassland management had more mixed success in Region 9, where activist efforts led to reduced mowing on the Croton Point Park landfill, leading to the return of Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark; unfortunately the grasslands there were mowed in mid-July and breeding of these species was not confirmed.

Other notable breeding records this season included Region 1's first confirmed breeding of Sandhill Crane at Oak Orchard WMA; first county breeding records of Clay-colored Sparrow in Oneida County and Willet in

Westchester County; and Long Island's first breeding record of Yellow-throated Warbler.

Shorebird Migration

Another consequence of the above-average precipitation experienced in many Regions was a subsequent reduction in available shorebird habitat in traditional locations, particularly along lakeshore locations upstate. The Lake Erie shoreline in Region 1 remained productive, with shorebird highlights there including multiple American Avocets and three Marbled Godwits, the latter representing the Region's first summer record since 1998.

In Region 3, Knox-Marcellus Marsh in Montezuma NWR was productive for much of the summer; records there during the season included high counts of Stilt Sandpiper and American Golden-Plover, a remarkable 48 Hudsonian Godwits, and three Red Knots, an uncommon species inland. Red Knot was also recorded upstate in Region 2, and another individual in Region 3 provided the first Tompkins County record; the latter bird was banded and traced back to Delaware Bay. Elsewhere away from the coast, an excellent count of 32 Solitary Sandpipers was found in Region 5; a single flock of 53 Whimbrel was recorded in Region 6; and American Avocet, Whimbrel, and a first Sullivan County record of Ruddy Turnstone were found in Region 9.

As is often the case, Region 10 turned in a number of shorebird highlights, including Black-necked Stilt, Curlew Sandpiper, two Ruffs, and an apparent Dunlin x White-rumped Sandpiper hybrid. The most remarkable shorebird story involved a two-day, two-state journey culminating in the discovery of a Red-necked Stint at Cupsogue in Region 10— check the Regional report for details!

Summer Wanderers and Rarities

As is often the case, the summer season produced a number of wanderers, strays and interesting records for those willing to fight through the 'summer doldrums'. Batavia Wastewater Treatment Plant in Region 1 once again hosted an Eared Grebe, and Red-necked Grebe and Horned Grebe were reported from two and four Regions, respectively. American White Pelicans were relatively widespread, with observations in all reporting Regions except for Regions 5 and 7. Brown Pelican, as usual, was limited to Region 10, where four one-day-only sightings continued a general recent pattern. Summer is often good for wandering herons; this year these included Cattle Egret in Region 1; inland Little Blue Herons in Regions 2 and 9; Tricolored Heron in Region 6; Glossy Ibis in Region 3; and White-faced Ibis at Jamaica Bay in Region 10.

Somewhat surprisingly given the recent trend, there were no apparent nesting Mississippi Kites reported this summer, although cooperative individuals were found enjoying the 17-year cicada outbreaks in Region 9 and

on Staten Island in Region 10. A Swallow-tailed Kite was spectacularly photographed at State Line Lookout—while the photographer was standing in New Jersey, the Kite must have crossed in from New York State immediately prior.

Unseasonal gulls included Little Gulls in Region 1 and Region 8; Laughing Gulls in Region 1 and Region 3; and Black-headed Gull in Region 10. Jaegers made a strong showing for the season, with all three species recorded, including Region 1's first July record of Pomarine Jaeger and second and third July records of Parasitic Jaeger. Region 10 produced several more Pomarine Jaegers, and Long-tailed Jaegers were found in Regions 5 and 10. Cupsogue County Park (Suffolk) in Region 10 experienced the best showing of early summer Arctic Terns to date, and eight Sandwich Terns in the Region were slightly higher than recent norms. Unusual pelagic species in Region 10 included a June Northern Fulmar, White-faced and Leach's Storm-Petrels, and Bridled Tern. More unusual was a Manx Shearwater photographed on the Hudson River in Region 9.

Probably the rarest passerine of the summer was a Fork-tailed Flycatcher, photographed in eastern Long Island on 25 Jun but seen only that day. Other unusual passerines for the season included a Western Kingbird in Region 2, Dickcissel in Region 3, and Yellow-breasted Chats in Regions 1, 5, 9, and 10. The latter days of August brought some good early fall migrants as Connecticut Warblers were found in Regions 5 and 6 and Lark Sparrows in Regions 9 and 10, all of these sightings from 27 August or later.

Perhaps most exciting were two first records for New York State (both pending acceptance by NYSARC). On 3 July an Elegant Tern was identified at Cupsogue County Park in Region 10 and was seen by a number of observers at various locations between there and Shinnecock Inlet to the east over the following five days. On 14 August a Neotropic Cormorant was photographed in a flock of Double-crested Cormorants flying west past Hamlin Beach State Park (Monroe County) in Region 2. Either of these would make a worthy Bird of the Season; my choice here is for the Elegant Tern, which was enjoyed by many more birders during its stay.