

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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The first of June was very warm in Watertown, with a temperature of 88° F, but this was not typical of the month, as the mean temperature was just 65.0°, nearly one degree below normal. June was exceptionally wet, with 6.5" of precipitation, a full three inches above normal. July was warmer and drier, with a mean temperature that was 2.7° above normal and precipitation that was 1.4" below normal. August was 0.7° cooler than normal, with slightly less precipitation than usual.

Water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River were already high to begin the season, and June's rain raised them even higher. High water persisted throughout the summer, leaving little exposed shoreline for shorebirds, and there was some anecdotal evidence suggesting that many loon and other waterbird nests were flooded out. Most visits to El Dorado and other Lake Ontario shorebird spots yielded few to no migratory shorebirds, but the season's shorebird list was surprisingly diverse given the low numbers. Notable shorebirds included 53 Whimbrel Gerry Smith saw in a single flock off Pillar Point on 22 July, American Golden-Plover and Baird's Sandpiper on Fort Drum on 30 August, and a Red-necked Phalarope at the Canton Sewage Ponds for the third consecutive year.

Given the high water it was no surprise that Tony Shrimpton saw few shorebirds at El Dorado on a 1 June visit, but the **Tricolored Heron** he observed and photographed was the rarest bird of the season. Runner-up was an **American White Pelican** that soared over Gerry Smith's house in Lewis County on 4 July. Noteworthy among other waterbirds was the abandonment by Great Egrets of a late summer roost site in St. Lawrence County used by 150 or more individuals annually for many years. The reason that the egrets failed to appear at this roost in 2013 is unclear but may have been related to low water levels in the swamp where the site was located. Small numbers of egrets were observed at other swamps in the area throughout the summer, but not in anything resembling the numbers that typically roosted in Winthrop.

Common Tern nests were found at fewer St. Lawrence River colonies than last year, but perhaps more importantly productivity was half that seen in 2012. Predation was a major factor in nest losses, with Great Horned Owls and Peregrine Falcons taking many birds. The owls have been depredating tern nests for years, but Peregrine Falcons have only recently begun nesting on the St. Lawrence River, so represent a new threat to river tern colonies. Twenty Common Tern nests on Little Galloo Island were the first documented there in recent history, but most of these nests failed. Nearly 500 fewer Caspian Tern nests were counted at Little Galloo Island compared to last year, with no obvious reason for the decline, unless it is somehow related to the record high

number of Herring Gull nests recorded on the island in 2013. Black Terns were observed in typical numbers at Perch River and Upper and Lower Lakes WMAs and Wilson Bay marsh, the main nesting locations in Region 6.

Jacob Berl conducted the second and last year of his graduate research project studying Red-headed Woodpeckers on Fort Drum. Jacob found 11 territories compared with 15 last year, the lower number perhaps a consequence of very poor productivity in 2012. Last year's low nest success resulted primarily from predation, but predation was low in 2013, and nest success and productivity was much better. Jacob was never able to determine the identity of the nest raiders last year, but his suspicion that they were squirrels seems bolstered by the coincidence this year of a massive acorn crop and very little predation. At least three pairs of Red-headed Woodpeckers raised two broods in 2013, something that had never been documented on Fort Drum before.

Among the most interesting and under-birded portions of Region 6 is an area stretching from the Indian River Lakes at the boundary of Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties eastward to Dekalb. Numerous rocky, wooded ridges and narrow valleys holding wet meadows with shrubby margins characterize this area, which is referred to by geologists as the Northwest Adirondack Lowlands, although it lies well outside the blue line. These ridges are home to the majority of Cerulean Warblers in Region 6, and in 2013 was the only area in the Region where Yellow-billed Cuckoos were found. Perhaps the greatest avian significance of this area is that Golden-winged Warblers persist in high numbers with few Blue-winged Warblers or hybrids. Observations from 2013 and previous years indicate that Golden-winged Warblers far outnumber Blue-winged Warblers and hybrids here. By contrast, to the south and west from Fort Drum to the alvar of northern Jefferson County, Blue-winged Warblers now clearly outnumber Golden-winged Warblers, and hybrids are numerous as well. Portions of the St. Lawrence valley to the north and west still have few Blue-winged Warblers, but hybrids occur at about a 1:1 ratio with Golden-winged Warblers. It is becoming increasingly apparent that this landscape of ridges and valleys represents the best opportunity for Golden-winged Warblers to persist in northern New York over the long term.

The Jefferson County Henslow's Sparrow population has declined precipitously during the past two decades, especially since 2000, but there was finally an encouraging development regarding the continued existence of the species in Region 6. For the past few years several private fields in the county have been managed for grassland birds under a landowner incentive program run by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and for the first time Henslow's Sparrows were documented in three of these fields, with a maximum of 10-12 males in one field. Although apparently absent in May, at least two Henslow's Sparrows showed up on Dog Hill Road at Perch River WMA in June, two were on nearby Tubelino Road in Clayton, and at least 6 and as many as 12 were on Fort Drum. The actual number of males present on Fort Drum was difficult to determine because males were found singing from some locations for very brief periods of time, sometimes just a single day, and only six males were found consistently in the same location for more than two

weeks. All of these locations together amount to the highest Henslow's Sparrow tally recorded in Jefferson County in several years.

Among other grassland birds, Upland Sandpipers were found in modestly higher numbers than during the past couple of years, almost certainly because of numerous visits to Jefferson County by out-of-region birders specifically targeting grassland birds. Still, Upland Sandpiper requires far more effort to find in Jefferson County than it did prior to about 2000, and as usual went unreported in Lewis and St. Lawrence Counties, although this absence of sightings in the latter counties may reflect low observer effort as much as an absence of birds. At least 22 Sedge Wrens were reported, about 70% on Fort Drum, where this year's tally of 15 singing males was about average. Fort Drum also had a one-day high count of 26 singing male Vesper Sparrows, but this represents only a small percentage of the total number of Vesper Sparrows nesting on the military installation.

Other songbirds worth noting include continued evidence that Orchard Orioles are increasing as breeders in Region 6, as this species is now well established on Point Peninsula and at Perch River WMA and probably elsewhere in Jefferson County. Northern finches were barely detected this summer, with just one each report of Pine Siskin and White-winged Crossbill. A Connecticut Warbler in Canton on 31 August was probably the rarest passerine of the season.

There was some discussion throughout the summer that songbird numbers were unusually low throughout the Region, with some evidence to support this contention at least locally or for some species. For instance the Breeding Bird Survey route I have run in St. Lawrence County for eight years had about 10% fewer birds than my previous low year. Other birders reported similar low tallies, especially from the Adirondacks. Among individual species, Baltimore Oriole numbers were most conspicuously low, and this species was astonishingly difficult to find in many places. More typically, many species seemed to be scarce in some areas but present in average numbers elsewhere, and it is not clear to me just how extensive this lack of birds really was.

For the season I received reports of an even 200 species, a tally that is about average but was lower than it could have been as several breeding species with limited distributions went unreported, including Louisiana Waterthrush and Hooded Warbler. To me the highlight of the season was the apparent increase in Henslow's Sparrow territories, but the rarity of the season was certainly the Tricolored Heron found by Tony Shrimpton. Unfortunately, as so often happens with rarities in Region 6, only a single observer was able to see this bird.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFWMA – Ashland Flats WMA; BI – Barnhart Island, T Massena; CV – T Cape Vincent; CWF – Canton wastewater facility; ED – El Dorado Shores Preserve, T Ellisburg; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton; LGI – Little Galloo Island; LWMA – Lakeview WMA, T Ellisburg; MM – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; PilPt – Pillar Point; PRGC – Partridge Run Golf Course trail, T Canton; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; RWSP – Robert G. Wehle SP; SLGW – St. Lawrence Grasslands & Wetlands Management District refuge and headquarters, T Dekalb; SLR – St. Lawrence River; StPt – Stony Point; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WS – Winthrop Swamp, T Stockholm; WISP—Wellesley Island SP.

WHISTLING-DUCKS—VULTURES

Snow Goose: Brownville 13 Jun (NL); Lyme 26-27 Jun (NL).
Trumpeter Swan: prob nesting ULLWMA.
Wood Duck: max 218 WHWMA 18 Aug.
Am. Wigeon: 2 PRWMA 29 Jun, only report before Aug.
Gadwall: 2 PRWMA 1 Jun; 2 AFWMA 14 Jun; only reports.
Am. Black Duck: about 12 reports 1-4.
Blue-winged Teal: max 17 CWF 30 Aug.
Green-winged Teal: max 6 AFWMA 14 Jun.
Redhead: max 15 WHWMA 17 Aug.
Ring-necked Duck: max 66 ULLWMA 31 Aug.
Greater Scaup: f PRWMA 9 Jun (NL), rare in summer.
Com. Merganser: max 7 ED 25 Aug.
Ruffed Grouse: few broods reported.
Com. Loon: no y reported from several lakes where nests presumably flooded.
Pied-billed Grebe: max 55 ULLWMA 31 Aug.
Double-crested Cormorant: 2387 nests LGI.
AM. WHITE PELICAN: soaring over Barnes Corners 4 Jul (GS!).
Am. Bittern: max 9 AFWMA 18 Aug.
Least Bittern: Hammond 9 Jun; Eel Pd Rd T Stockholm 23 Jun; SLGW 24 Jun; Porter Lynch Rd T Stockholm 28 Jul; multiple reports PRWMA & ULLWMA.
Great Egret: WS late summer roost used annually since at least 1987 abandoned; up to 8/day Massena Jul & Aug, *intro*.
TRICOLORED HERON: ED 1 Jun (TS, ph!).
Black-crowned Night-Heron: 56 nests Gull Is; 40 nests Murphy Is.

HAWKS - ALCIDS

Com. Gallinule: 9 Hayden Rd T Dekalb 12 Jul; 9 CR 17 Dekalb 30 Jul; highest counts away from PRWMA where 5-10+/day thru.
Am. Coot: LWMA 25 Jun; 3 PRWMA 29 Jun; only reports.
Sandhill Crane: pr w colt LWMA 5 Jul (GS).
Black-bellied Plover: 2 StPt 31 Aug, only report.
Am. Golden-Plover: 2+ FD 30 Aug.
Semipalmated Plover: max 2 StPt 31 Aug; singles CWF, PRWMA, T Gouverneur only other reports.
Killdeer: max 26 Lyme 22 Aug.
Spotted Sandpiper: max 14 CWF 16 Aug included nearly pure white ind.
Solitary Sandpiper: arr Dekalb 4 Jul.
Greater Yellowlegs: arr Dekalb 7 Jul.
Lesser Yellowlegs: max 9 CWF 12 Aug.
Upland Sandpiper: possibly different ind Clayton 1 Jun (BB) & 3 Jul (AV); 4-5 pr FD Jun (JB); Lyme 7 Jun (NL); CV 9 Jun (NL); Hounsfield 5 Jul (TS); max 16 at traditional FD mid-summer gathering site 18 Jul.
Whimbrel: 53 PilPt 22 Jul (GS).
Ruddy Turnstone: SLR Massena 2 Jun, only report.
Sanderling: 12 T Ellisburg 27 Jul, only report.
Semipalmated Sandpiper: 1-2/day CWF 12-25 Aug; ED 16 Aug; only reports.
Least Sandpiper: max 31 CWF 16 Aug.
Baird's Sandpiper: FD 30 Aug (JB).
Pectoral Sandpiper: Dekalb 30 Jul, only report.

Red-necked Phalarope: juv CWF 19-20 Aug (JB, EW).

Bonaparte's Gull: arr Ellisburg 27 Jul.

Herring Gull: 645 nests LGI, record high.

Com. Tern: 1127 nests at 14 sites SLR where productivity only half that of 2012 (LH); 20 nests LGI where nesting has not been documented in recent decades.

Caspian Tern: 1848 nests LGI down from 2332 in 2012.

Black Tern: 40+/day PRWMA & ULLWMA Jun & Jul; 20 Wilson Bay marsh 28 Jun; 2 AFWMA 4 Jul; 46 near Horse Is 14 Aug after most departed nesting locations.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: 6 reports Adirondack Lowlands W STLA Jun & Jul; no other reports.

Black-billed Cuckoo: modest increase from 2012; most abundant in Adirondack Lowlands.

E. Screech-Owl: Dekalb 18 Jun, only report away from L Ontario.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Dekalb 24 Jun, only report.

Com. Nighthawk: 4-10/day FD thru; not reported elsewhere until modest movement late Aug.

E. Whip-poor-will: max 36 on 10-stop survey route FD.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 11 pr FD where nest success high and at least 3 pr raised 2 broods.

Merlin: confirmed nest in CV.

Peregrine Falcon: Payne L nest fledged 4 y; Ogdensburg Bridge nest failed; terr pr BI; PRWMA 20 & 24 Aug.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: only 5 reports Adirondack breeding sites likely reflecting low observer effort; migrants Hammond 24 Aug; FD 28 Aug.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: last northbound migrant FD 6 Jun.

Philadelphia Vireo: arr Hammond 24 Aug.

Sedge Wren: 2 Hammond 5 Jun (NL); 5 males FD early Jun increased to 15 by early Jul (JB); Dekalb 16 Jun (JB); 2 LWMA 25 Jun (CC); Hyde L 5 Aug (KC); Potsdam 25 Aug (MBW).

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: 9 reports from Lake Ontario Plain and St. Lawrence Valley.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: 2 Canton Norway spruce plantation 26 Jul, only report outside Adirondacks & Tug Hill.

N. Mockingbird: Wanakena yard T Fine 29 Jun, rare in Adirondacks (BC); only 2 ad FD where 9 terr in 2012.

Swainson's Thrush: no reports outside Adirondacks.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Louisiana Waterthrush: no reports likely reflecting low observer effort LEWI where most occur R6.

Golden-winged Warbler: continuing to decline relative to Blue-winged Warblers FD; most abundant Indian River Lakes E to Dekalb, *intro.*

Blue-winged Warbler: continuing to increase FD and S & central JEFF; scarce from Indian River Lakes N & E.

Golden-winged X Blue-winged Warbler hybrid: approximately 50% of all winged warblers much of St. Lawrence Valley.

Tennessee Warbler: arr FD 21 Aug; max 10 Hammond 24 Aug.

Connecticut Warbler: PRGC 31 Aug (JB), rare.

Mourning Warbler: max 12 singing male on 24 3-min counts Tooley Pond Rd STLA 30 Jun.

Cape May Warbler: arr Hammond 24 Aug; max 9 PRGC 31 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: 4 Long Pond T Croghan 6 Jul (MR); 10 along ridges S Black L Jun & Jul.

N. Parula: no reports outside Adirondacks.

Bay-breasted Warbler: arr FD 27 Aug.

Blackburnian Warbler: max 13 singing m Tooley Pond Rd STLA 30 Jun.

Blackpoll Warbler: Jordan R T Colton, only report (JS).

Palm Warbler: nesting reports from 5 STLA bogs & fens.

Prairie Warbler: max 6 Limerick Cedars 9 Jul.

Canada Warbler: max 9 FD 6 Jun.

Wilson's Warbler: last northbound migrant ICNC 2 Jun; arr RWSP 24 Aug.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: Grant Road CV 5 Jun; Swamp Road CV 20 Jun; 4 Butterville Rd Henderson Jul; max 24 singing m FD 9 Jul.

Vesper Sparrow: max 26 FD 23 Jul; singles Dog Hill Rd T Orleans 4 Jul (BP) & Johnson Rd T Canton 26 Jul (JB), only reports off FD.

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 20 FD 22 Jun; 7 reports elsewhere N JEFF.

Henslow's Sparrow: 6-12 terr FD Jun & Jul; 2 arr PRWMA early Jun; 2 Tubelino Rd Clayton early Jun; 15+ in 3 JEFF farm fields enrolled in NYSDEC landowner incentive program, *intro.*

Lincoln's Sparrow: max 12 MM 2 Jun.

Dark-eyed Junco: CV 1 Jun; WISP 14 Jun; 2 PRWMA 27 Jul; only reports outside Adirondacks & Tug Hill.

Bobolink: pre-migratory flocks 50-75 ind FD by 11 Jul.

Orchard Oriole: max 3 PRWMA 15 Jun,
where apparently established breeder (JY);
Lyme 15 Jul (NL); sev reports PtPen where
nesting 1st recorded R6.

Baltimore Oriole: much less common than
usual.

White-winged Crossbill: FD 5 Jul, only report.

Pine Siskin: 2 Hopkinton 8 Aug, only report.

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