

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

Jeffrey S. Bolsinger

98 State Street, Canton NY 13617

jsbolsinger@yahoo.com

The summer started off warm, with a mean June temperature in Watertown of 66.3° F, or 1.5° above normal. The rest of the summer was cooler, with mean temperatures that were 1.2° below normal in July and 1.1° cooler than normal in August. Precipitation was remarkably consistent through the season, with 4.35" in June, 4.34" in July, and 4.10" in August. The June and July totals were both about 0.9" above normal, and these two months continued a stretch of consecutive months with above-normal precipitation that started in April but was broken in August, when that month's precipitation total was 0.2" below normal. The wet spring and early summer contributed to high water on nearly every pond, lake, and stream in the Region, especially Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, where virtually no shoreline was exposed.

Waterfowl and waterbirds were mostly unexceptional, with most species present in typical numbers. The most unusual waterfowl reports were of several Snow Geese at Perch River that lingered into early June, but early summer Snow Geese are now virtually annual, so this wasn't really a surprise. Notable among waterbirds was the relative scarcity of Pied-billed Grebes at several traditional nesting locations, especially Upper and Lower Lakes, where daily tallies were less than half that recorded in most recent years.

Large numbers of Great Egrets were observed throughout northeastern and central St. Lawrence County all summer, especially from mid-July to late August, although it is not clear whether any of these birds nested in Region 6. Persistent rumors of a rookery in northeastern St. Lawrence County have never been confirmed, and all of these egrets may have come from nesting sites in Quebec or elsewhere outside of the Region. In past years, up to 200 Great Egrets have been reported at an evening roost at Winthrop Swamp, but, given these roosting numbers, surprisingly few were seen during daytime. This summer was quite the reverse, with egrets being conspicuous over a large portion of St. Lawrence County during the daytime, but since the Winthrop roost was abandoned in 2013 the locations of night roosts are no longer known. As usual,

there was only a handful of reports of 1-2 Great Egrets in Jefferson and Lewis Counties.

Sandhill Cranes in several locations suggest increasing numbers of nesting pairs in Region 6, although the precise number of nesting locations remains unclear. Three cranes found in Turin in Lewis County in the spring were joined by a fourth during the summer; this latter bird apparently was a juvenile although the age of this bird was not well documented. The age makeup was also unclear for four cranes in Louisville, St. Lawrence County, where some reports that suggested juveniles were present were not definitive. Sandhill Cranes were also heard at Upper and Lower Lakes WMA at least twice. There were no summer reports at Lakeview WMA, where cranes have nested several years and were present in the spring, nor from Lisbon, where cranes were suspected to nest for several years but have not been reported since 2012.

The lack of exposed shoreline on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River and high water almost everywhere else left little habitat for migrating shorebirds, and I received even fewer shorebird reports than has become the recent norm. Most sightings came from a few locations, such as Wilson Hill WMA, where shorebirds were seen foraging on several sandy islands in the refuge impoundments but did not stay for very long. Wilson Hill highlights included one each American Golden-Plover and Sanderling, both on 16 August. The only other golden-plover sighting was of two on a large lawn near Ogdensburg on 27 August. Shorebird use of the Canton sewage ponds varies dramatically between years, and few shorebirds were present this summer, although this is the most reliable location for Red-necked Phalarope in Region 6 and singles were present on 15 and 22 August. The best shorebird tally of the season was made by Margo Goetschkes at a farm pond in Cape Vincent, with nine species that included seasonal high counts for Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper, and Semipalmated Sandpiper. It seems very likely that had more birders checked farm ponds near Lake Ontario regularly, the season's shorebird tally would have been more robust.

Colonial waterbird numbers were generally high this summer. After several years of declines associated with mortality from Type E botulism, the Caspian Tern colony on Little Galloo Island is growing again, with a record high 2436 nests in 2014. For the second consecutive year Common Terns also nested on Little Galloo Island after many years of absence but apparently not with any success. These Common Terns are no doubt spilling over from the St. Lawrence River, where the 1250 nests that were counted on the New York side of the river are slightly below modern high counts, and productivity was double that in 2013 and very close to the long-term mean. Results from NYSDEC Black Tern surveys, conducted approximately once every three years, found fewer pairs in Jefferson County and more pairs in St. Lawrence County than had been found on any previous survey, with the majority at Perch River and Upper and Lower Lakes WMAs, respectively. A record-high number of Herring Gulls nested on

Little Galloo Island as well, but Ring-billed Gull nests were not counted in 2014.

A few other non-passerine species of note are highlighted by a Snowy Owl that was photographed on an island in the St. Lawrence River on 7 August. Given the large number of Snowy Owls that persisted well into the spring, I was almost surprised that only one was seen during the summer. Six Yellow-billed Cuckoos are slightly higher than the recent norm for years without major tent caterpillar outbreaks, and Black-billed Cuckoo numbers were higher than the previous two years. Eastern Whip-poor-wills were present in typical numbers at Fort Drum and Chaumont Barrens but were hardly reported elsewhere, at least partly because of low observer effort. As usual, Common Nighthawks were common during June and July at Fort Drum but almost entirely absent elsewhere until migrants passed through in August.

Surveys on Fort Drum tallied 58 male Golden-winged Warblers compared to 97 male Blue-winged Warblers, the lowest ratio of Golden-winged to Blue-winged Warblers documented during any one year on the installation and continuing long-term trends for both species. Also found on these surveys were 34 territorial male hybrids; between 17% and 20% of all “winged warblers” observed on Fort Drum have been phenotypic hybrids each year since these surveys began in 2008. By comparison, in and near the Indian River Lakes area of northern Jefferson and western St. Lawrence Counties, 22 male Golden-winged Warblers were reported compared to just one Blue-winged Warbler and three hybrids. This latter area appears to be the best hope for Golden-winged Warbler to persist in Region 6.

Easily the biggest surprise of the summer was a Kirtland’s Warbler that occupied a territory in a red pine plantation on Fort Drum for at least two weeks. I found the Kirtland’s Warbler on 4 June, just three days after Andy Guthrie found one in western New York, and observed it every 1-3 days until I last saw it on 18 June. Throughout this period the male divided his time between foraging in dense pine foliage and singing extended bouts of song from the tops of trees, always staying within the red pine plantation until the last few days he was present. Unfortunately, this bird was in a permanently off-limits area on Fort Drum, so visitors were not able to see it.

During early June it seemed like Henslow’s Sparrows were virtually absent from Region 6, but by July 39-40 males were present in four locations. NYSDEC personnel surveyed fields in late May and early June at Perch River and Ashland Flats WMAs and at one field enrolled in a Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) finding no Henslow’s Sparrows. A second round of surveys between mid June and mid July turned up 14 males at Perch River and eight at the LIP property, and the final round of surveys in late July yielded 16 at Perch River, five at Ashland Flats, and 11 at the LIP site. Nick Leone had found one Henslow’s Sparrow at Ashland Flats in early June, and it is likely that at least one bird was here but missed on at least one round of surveys. Similarly, I searched fields on Fort Drum repeatedly, finding just two males by mid June but

7-8 males in late June and July. My impression on Fort Drum, and this may extend to the other sites as well, was that a small number of males were present early in the summer but sang rarely and thus evaded detection, with more males, perhaps the bulk present this year, arriving during June and July.

Other grassland birds were reported in typical numbers. As has become the recent norm, Upland Sandpipers were scarce, with at least six or seven pair at Fort Drum but only two breeding season reports elsewhere. Sedge Wren numbers were about average, with at least 13 territorial males on Fort Drum and one to three individuals each at Ashland Flats, Lakeview, Perch River, and Point Peninsula WMAs. Also typical, Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows were abundant in sandy areas on Fort Drum but scarce, or in the case of Vesper Sparrow, completely unreported elsewhere. The only Grasshopper Sparrow report outside of Jefferson County was one at Robert Moses State Park in Massena, an unusual location. Clay-colored Sparrow, not really a grassland bird but found in many of the same areas, was found at six Jefferson County sites in addition to Fort Drum, where the species remains locally very common.

Other noteworthy passerines include two Orchard Oriole reports, one in Massena on 1 June and a pair at Perch River WMA on 2 July. Rather surprising was a singing Pine Grosbeak at Massawepie Mire on 5 and 6 June, as this species is virtually unrecorded in New York during summer. The only other northern finch sightings were of a single Red Crossbill, also at Massawepie Mire on 4 July, and two Evening Grosbeaks at a feeder in Parishville on 26 August.

For the season I received reports of 201 species, which is about average for the past three or four years but more than were reported during the years before eBird was widely used. The Fort Drum Kirtland's Warbler was certainly the highlight of the season, but in some ways it was also the biggest disappointment, as few people were able to see this bird. The continuing expansion of the contributor pool that eBird has facilitated is certainly worth commenting on, as some eBirders are now providing regular reports from areas from where reports were rarely or never submitted to the Region 6 editor. Some of these birders are Mandi Roggie, Deborah Earl, and Nancy Loomis in the Black River Valley, and Doug and Ann Emlin in eastern St. Lawrence County. Unfortunately, birders in the Adirondacks are still lacking, and, except for Massawepie Mire, which is frequently birded by visitors from out of the Region, I received very few reports from the Adirondacks.

CONTRIBUTORS

Marilyn Badger, Alan Belford, Diane Bliss, Jeff Bolsinger, Carol Cady, Bernie Carr, Daniel Ceravolo, Kelly Close, Joan Collins, Mary Curtis, Gregg Dashnau, Benjamin Dixon, Deborah Earl, Doug & Ann Emlin, Wayne Fidler, Margo Goetschkes, Lee Harper, Steve Kelling, Greg Lawrence, Patricia Lindsay, Monica LeClerc, Nick Leone, Nancy Loomis, Mark Magistro, Mary Magistro, Irene Mazzocchi, Haynes Miller, Shai Mitra, Michael Morgan, Eugene Nichols, Deanna Piiparinen, Lauri Piiparinen, Bill Purcell, Mandi Roggie, Bryan

Sabourin, Michael Scheibel, Mickey Scilingo, Gerry Smith, Thomas Smith, Chris Stranger, Elizabeth Truskowski, Charley West, Tom & Eileen Wheeler, Thomas & Colleen Williams.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFWMA – Ashland Flats WMA; BI – Barnhart I, T Massena; CB – Chaumont Barrens preserve, T Clayton; CV – T Cape Vincent; CWF – Canton wastewater treatment facility; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; LC – Limerick Cedars preserve, T Brownville; LGI – Little Galloo I; LWMA – Lakeview WMA, T Ellisburg; MM – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; RMSP – Robert Moses SP, T Massena; SLR – St. Lawrence R; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WISP – Wellesley Island SP.

WHISTLING-DUCKS—VULTURES

Snow Goose: sev PRWMA to at least 8 Jun.

Mute Swan: 2 Murray I 3 Jun, only report.

Trumpeter Swan: at least 2 pr PRWMA, produced at least 4 y; pr ULLWMA, no y seen.

Wood Duck: max 218 WHWMA 18 Aug.

Gadwall: max 11 SLR Waddington 20 Jul.

Am. Black Duck: 1-6/day Star Lake thru; 3 T Alexandria 10 Jun; 2 T Theresa 27 Jun; 2 Five Ponds Wilderness 2 Jul; only reports before late Jul; about 12 reports 1-5/day late Jul & Aug.

Blue-winged Teal: AFWMA 3 Jun; Putney Rd swamp T Dekalb 15 Jun; Green Rd swamp 3 Jul; several reports ULLWMA Jun & early Jul; only reports before Aug.

N. Shoveler: 5-6 PRWMA 23-26 Aug, only reports.

N. Pintail: WHWMA 16 Aug, only report.

Green-winged Teal: PRWMA 29 Jun, only report before mid-Jul; 5 reports 16 Jul thru.

Redhead: 9 WHWMA 30 Aug, only report.

Ring-necked Duck: several broods ULLWMA; a few reports from Adirondacks lacking details on location or number; max 79 ULLWMA 31 Aug.

Com. Merganser: max 20 SLR Waddington 20 Jul.

Ruffed Grouse: many anecdotal reports suggest better productivity than previous 2 years.

Com. Loon: Hyde L, Payne L, FD & ULLWMA, only loc away from Adirondacks, Tug Hill, & SLR

Pied-billed Grebe: max 65 WHWMA 16 Aug; 38 ULLWMA 31 Aug; fewer than recent years.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 2283 nests LGI higher than 2010 & 2012 but lower than

every other year since 1988 because of NYSDEC egg oiling, culling, & harassment; NYSDEC continued efforts to eliminate cormorant nests from Gull I to minimize competition with Black-crowned Night-Herons.

Am. Bittern: 4-6/day FD old fields include 3 nests with y Jun & Jul; widespread reports at marshes and wetlands mostly lacked numbers.

Least Bittern: multiple PRWMA & ULLWMA; Goose Bay T Alexandria 18 Jun, only other report.

Great Egret: max 19 Bombay SF 1 Aug; up to 17/day ULLWMA 10 Aug thru; many reports 1-9/day Massena & adjacent towns N STLA thru; few reports 1-2/day Aug JEFF & LEWI.

Green Heron: max 17 CWF 4 Aug.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: max 79 nests LGI; 19 nests Murphy I.

HAWKS—TERNS

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 9 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 12 reports.

N. Goshawk: FD thru; T Potsdam 1 Jun; Bombay SF 1 Aug; 2 T Hopkinton 29 Aug.

Red-shouldered Hawk: T Macomb 15 Jun; T Croghan 21 Jun; Bombay SF 1 Aug; Cranberry L thru; declining?

Virginia Rail: only 6 reports.

Sora: ULLWMA 17 Aug, only report.

Com. Gallinule: max 8 PRWMA 29 Jun; few reports elsewhere.

Am. Coot: PRWMA 29 Jun, only report.

Sandhill Crane: 5 ICNC 1 Jun, possibly late migr; 3 ad T Turin thru, where 1 y in Aug (DE); 4 T Louisville, where nesting suspected; increasing as breeder in R6.

Black-bellied Plover: 8 CV 13 Aug, only report.

Am. Golden-Plover: WHWMA 16 Aug; 2 T Oswegatchie 27 Aug.

Semipalmated Plover: max 20 CV 13 Aug; 5 other reports all 16-19 Aug.

Killdeer: max 49 CV 31 Jul.

Spotted Sandpiper: max 11 CWF 7 Aug.

Solitary Sandpiper: arr FD 22 Jul.

Greater Yellowlegs: max 10 CV 13 Aug.

Lesser Yellowlegs: 2 arr CV 31 Jul; max 29 CV 8 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: at least 6-7 terr FD Jun & Jul; only other breeding reports Chaumont 21 Jun (SK) & Hounsfield 28 Jun (WF, MkM, MyM); presumed migr FD 15 Jul & ULLWMA 4 Aug.

Sanderling: WHWMA 16 Aug, only report.

Least Sandpiper: max 40 CV 13 Aug; only 7 other reports.

Pectoral Sandpiper: arr T Philadelphia 15 Jul; CV 13 Aug, only other report.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: max 10 CV 13 Aug; only 3 other reports.

Short-billed Dowitcher: 3 ICNC 5 Aug; CV 13 Aug; only reports.

Red-necked Phalarope: CWF 15 & 22 Aug; annual at this site.

Bonaparte's Gull: WISP 13 Aug, only report.

Herring Gull: 979 nests LGI, record high; 109 nests Gull I where also increasing;

Caspian Tern: 2436 nests LGI 6 Jun, record high (IM).

Black Tern: NYSDEC survey counted 47 nests JEFF mostly at PRWMA, lower than any previous year & 75 STLA mostly at ULLWMA, more than any previous survey, *intro*; confirmed nesting Edsall Swamp T Lyme 28 Jun.

Com. Tern: 1250 nests NYS side SLR, higher than 2013 but lower than modern record of 1394 nests in 2012; nests between Ogdensburg & Massena (majority of all nests) fledged 1.4 y/nest (LH); 22 nests LGI including 1 chick 14 Jul apparently all abandoned by 1 Aug.

PIGEONS—PARROTS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: 5 locations N JEFF & W STLA Jun in area where most R6 reported come from in non-tent caterpillar outbreak years; only other T Croghan 27 Jun.

Black-billed Cuckoo: 48 reports about double 2013 total.

E. Screech-Owl: Cranberry L 19 Aug, only report.

Snowy Owl: Big I SLR 7 Aug, 4th summer record since 2006, photos!.

Com. Nighthawk: breeding season max 15 FD 10 Jul; several reports migrants central STLA 20-26 Aug; max 20 T Potsdam 23 Aug.

E. Whip-poor-will: 20 CB 4 Jun; max 29 on ten-stop survey route FD 17 Jun.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 9 pr successfully fledged y FD including 2 broods on 1 terr.

Merlin: reports from T Dekalb, T Canton, T Croghan, T Massena, FD, LWMA, WHWMA, & Hitchens Bog.

Peregrine Falcon: T Watertown 2 Jun, prob late migr; reports from known nesting sites at BI & Payne L; Cranberry L 16 Aug & WHWMA 28 Aug, only other reports.

FLYCATCHERS—WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: only 3 reports S STLA, reflects low observer effort in Adirondacks; migr FD 28 Aug.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: last ICNC 4 Jun; breeding reports only from MM & High Falls Trail, reflects low observer effort in Adirondacks; arr Murray I 21 Aug.

Philadelphia Vireo: MM 9 Jun; Cranberry L 18 Aug; Bombay SF 30 Aug; only reports.

Horned Lark: FD 9 Jul; 5 CV 13 Aug; only reports.

Sedge Wren: 2 PRWMA 8 Jun; S Sandy Creek trail LWMA 19 Jul; 2 AFWMA; 3 PtPen WMA; max 13-15 terr FD thru.

Carolina Wren: Canton 9 Aug; FD 12 Aug; KC 30 Aug; first in sev months.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: max 4 LWMA 20 Aug; 6 other reports Lake Ontario Plain & St. Lawrence Valley.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: ULLWMA 12 Jul, only report outside Adirondacks.

N. Mockingbird: max 3 FD 10 Jul; T Watertown 15 Jul; imm CV 20 Jul.

Veery: heavy migratory movement T Canton & Russell early am 6 Aug.

Swainson's Thrush: migr ICNC 5 Aug & T Russell 6 Aug.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Louisiana Waterthrush: Red Lake Rd T Theresa 19 Jun, only report.

Golden-winged Warbler: 58 singing m on FD surveys; 22 m Indian River Lakes area Jun.

Blue-winged Warbler: 97 singing m on FD surveys where increasing; 1 m Indian River Lakes area Jun.

Golden-winged X Blue-winged Warbler

hybrid: 34 singing m on FD surveys; 3 m Indian River Lakes area Jun.

Tennessee Warbler: last ICNC 1 Jun; arr Cranberry L 17 Aug.

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER: terr m FD 4-18 Jun (JB, photos! rep to NYSARC), 1st Regional & 2nd State record, *intro*.

Cape May Warbler: Cranberry L 7 Aug, presumed early migr (DB); next rep Murray I. 22 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: 5 sites Indian River Lakes area Jun (NL, SK, JB); 2 locations T Croghan Jun & Jul (MR); 4 FD 3 Jul (JB).

N. Parula: none outside the Adirondacks.

Bay-breasted Warbler: last CB 8 Jun, late (GL); arr ULLWMA 17 Aug.

Blackpoll Warbler: last T Rossie 15 Jun (JB), late; arr Cranberry L 18 Aug.

Palm Warbler: breeding reports from MM, Cranberry L, Horseshoe L; FD 29 Aug, only migr.

Prairie Warbler: T Lyme 7 Jun; T Macomb 15 Jun; T Croghan 21 Jun; 2 Murray I 21 Aug; only reports away from usual nesting sites CB, FD, LC.

Wilson's Warbler: last 3 T Massena 1 Jun; arr FD 27 Aug.

TOWHEES—WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: PRWMA 3 Jun; LC 4 Jun; CB 4 & 7 Jun; T Lyme 7 Jun; 2 CV 28

Jun; up to 4/day Butterfield Rd T Henderson Jun; high counts of 28 singing m FD old hayfields 28 Jun & 17 singing m FD sandy fields and regenerating clearcuts 10 Jul.

Vesper Sparrow: one day max 62 singing m FD 10 Jul; no reports elsewhere.

Grasshopper Sparrow: one day max 44 singing m FD 10 Jul; RMSP 2 Jun; 3 CV 28 Jun & several reports PRWMA; only reports off FD.

Henslow's Sparrow: max 16 singing m on NYSDEC surveys Dog Hill Rd PRWMA Jul, where none found before mid June; 1 AFWMA 8 Jun (NL), where none on NYSDEC surveys until 5 found late Jul; 11 private field JEFF enrolled in NYSDEC landowner incentive program; 7-8 singing m FD Jul, where just 2 most of Jun; *intro*.

Lincoln's Sparrow: breeding reports from MM, Cranberry L, & Horseshoe L; no other reports.

Dark-eyed Junco: none outside Adirondacks and Tug Hill.

Bobolink: max 400 CV 24 Aug.

Orchard Oriole: SY male T Massena 1 Jun (JB); pr PRWMA 2 Jul (JB, PL, SM).

Pine Grosbeak: MM 5-6 June (CW, EW), rare in summer.

Red Crossbill: MM 4 Jul, only report (PL, SM).

Evening Grosbeak: 2 at T Parishville feeder 26 Aug (MS), only report.

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