

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SUMMER 2015

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June 2015 was very wet through most of the state, including all upstate Regions for which we received reports. There were no strong statewide trends in precipitation for July or August, or for temperature in any month. The intense rainfall experienced by much of western, central, and northern New York State during June presumably affected breeding success in many kinds of birds, but few direct observations supporting this idea were obtained.

Foremost among a number of positives for the breeding season, Piping Plovers nested successfully this summer along the Lake Ontario shore of Jefferson County. This is the first record for New York's Great Lakes shoreline in 30 years and is described in detail in a note in this issue. In Region 9, Ospreys nested successfully this summer in Ulster County, a first for the county in the modern era, and Ulster also recorded its first confirmed Merlin nesting this summer. In Region 8, two observations of Acadian Flycatchers during June suggested a range expansion from the nearest strongholds in Region 9 to the south. Clay-colored Sparrows now breed regularly over large parts of the state, just a few decades after their first confirmed nesting in 1971. Nelson's Sparrow also shows potential for expanding its breeding range into northernmost New York State, as indicated again this year with Nick Leone's discovery of a singing bird on 19 June in Region 6. Meanwhile, Orchard Orioles continued their expansion into Region 6 from the south, furnishing reports of probable and confirmed nesting. At the other end of the state, Cliff Swallows nested again in Region 10, where nesting evidence has been accumulating in recent summers in a relatively small area around the westernmost Long Island Sound, in Bronx and Nassau Counties.

Region 1 made another fine showing in the rarities department, with several remarkable records. A Neotropic Cormorant found by Jim Pawlicki was the Region's second and just the third for the state. Alec Humann's Swallow-tailed Kite was the first summer record for Region 1, and just fourth ever for the Region. A long-staying Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was much admired by many observers. Amazingly, this striking-looking species might be losing some of its mystique, at least in terms of rarity, as occurrences pile up—two more were found in Region 10 in July! A Great White Heron was described well by a single observer at Tobay, Nassau County, Long Island, on 16 July, but unfortunately no photos were obtained. This example illustrates the value of detailed descriptions and photos of even quite striking species. Great White Heron differs from Great Blue Heron not only in being white, but also in subtle points of structure and soft parts coloration. Furthermore, its white tone is subtly

but noticeably different from that of other white herons, such as Great Egret. Congruence among multiple characters is desirable to rule out, for instance, a leucistic or albinistic Great Blue Heron.

Long-tailed Jaeger and Sabine's Gull are regular along New York's Great Lakes shoreline and also far offshore (both species were recorded in Region 2 at the end of August, and the jaeger was reported on pelagics at the start of June and the end of August.) But both are nevertheless very rare from shore on Long Island. Thus, a Long-tailed Jaeger seen by Angus Wilson from Amagansett, eastern Long Island, on 6 June was very noteworthy, and another seen from Breezy Point, Queens, on 16 June by Doug Gochfeld and Sean Sime was potentially the first documented record for Queens County and New York City. Even more astonishingly, when the same intrepid duo returned to Breezy Point two days later, they encountered the even rarer-from-shore Sabine's Gull!

There was a greater than usual amount of birding effort offshore this summer, and collectively these trips were remarkably productive. Black-capped Petrels were found repeatedly and in numbers: **11** in the eastern portion of Long Island's far offshore waters on 29 August and **5** around Hudson Canyon on 31 August! Another Fea's Petrel was found, at the Rabbit Ears on 18 August, and a new state-high **60** Band-rumped Storm-Petrels were found near Hudson Canyon on 31 August. Species such as Leach's and White-faced Storm-Petrels, Audubon's Shearwater, South Polar Skua, Long-tailed Jaeger, and Bridled and Arctic Terns were recorded as well, as detailed in the report for Region 10.

BIRD OF THE SEASON

In terms of sheer rarity, Region 1's Neotropic Cormorant leaps to the fore, as does Region 10's Fea's Petrel. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks in Regions 1 and 10 were enjoyed by many observers but are less surprising after establishing a pattern of occurrence in recent years. In my opinion, the BOTS award for summer 2015 must go to Black-capped Petrel. The enigmatic Diablotin was considered almost impossible to see anywhere on Earth as recently as the mid-20th Century, so we've certainly come a long way, through the discovery of the species' regular occurrence in the Gulf Stream in the 1970s, to today, when we are literally unsure as to whether this species is actually even rare in New York's far offshore waters. A case can be made that conditions were unusually favorable during summer 2015, contributing to the spate of records from New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts. But it can also be argued that appropriate effort has been so sparse in the past that the species has been under-detected historically, at least to some extent. In any case, summer 2015's Black-capped Petrels will be vividly remembered by many for a very long time.