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REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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Summer started cool and wet, with temperatures rising and precipitation dropping through the season. June was about 1-3° F below normal throughout Region 6, with temperatures falling into the 30s on several nights early in the month. July's mean temperature was about normal and August was very slightly warmer than normal. The 5.7" of precipitation that fell on Watertown in June was exactly double average and was probably needed after a series of months with below normal precipitation. July and August were both drier than average, with Watertown receiving about 1.5" below average for the two months combined.

Although the summer started wet, there was little indication that June's rainfall had a negative effect on nest success. Several observers commented on a

relative abundance of Ruffed Grouse broods compared with the previous two years when cool and wet springs apparently led to poor nest success. Many also felt that Wild Turkeys were less abundant than they have been for several years and attributed declines to the effects of two consecutive hard winters. However, there was no shortage of turkey broods this summer. The wet June contributed to but was probably not the only reason for very high water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River that persisted through the summer.

Waterfowl numbers were about average with a few unusual sightings. There was one each Snow Goose and Brant report, which is now typical for the summer season, although the late July date for the Brant is unusual. Northern Shovelers were well reported at three Wildlife Management Areas, with probable breeding at Perch River and confirmed breeding at Ashland Flats. An adult male Bufflehead at Perch Lake all summer may have been an injured bird.

Pied-billed Grebes were not as numerous as usual at Upper and Lower Lakes and especially Wilson Hill Wildlife Management Areas, the two sites that usually have the Regional high counts for this species. The low numbers at Wilson Hill were probably one result of a drop in water levels for vegetation management conducted this spring, but there was no obvious reason for the reduced numbers at Upper and Lower Lakes. In contrast, more Pied-billed Grebes nested on a small marsh at Fort Drum than had been observed during any year in the nearly two decades this site has been observed, and Common Gallinules were also relatively abundant at this site.

Least Bitterns were reported from four WMAs and three other sites, but, given the large number of observers in the field this season, it seems like more should have been found. On 5 July, Lee Ellsworth counted 63 Black-crowned Night-Herons flying out of Perch River WMA at sunset for the highest tally I am aware of from this location. Great Egrets were also better reported from Jefferson County than during most summers, but I received few reports from northeast St. Lawrence County, where this species has been most abundant in recent years, and suspect that low observer effort accounts for this drop in sightings.

This season's shorebird tally is the highest in many years, thanks primarily to NYSDEC management at Perch River WMA, where the Stone Mills Pool was drained during the late spring creating numerous pools of shallow water during the summer. These pools attracted hundreds of shorebirds of at least 18 species, including the highest tallies reported in the last ten years for most regularly occurring species. The only true rarity at this site was **Western Sandpiper**, observed on 10, 13, and 28-29 August, although it is not clear whether these sightings represent one or two individuals. Other noteworthy shorebirds at Perch River included at least three Stilt Sandpipers, several Sanderling, just one White-rumped Sandpiper on 12 August, single Baird's Sandpipers on several dates with a high count of five 28 and 29 August, and Red-necked Phalaropes on 13 and 21 August. NYSDEC also partially drained several pools at Wilson Hill WMA this spring, attracting northbound shorebirds through at least the first

week of June, including the season's only Ruddy Turnstone on 8 June. By July extensive vegetation had grown up in these pools, making shorebird observation very difficult for the rest of the summer.

The shorebirding was unusually good at Perch River by Region 6 standards, but the best shorebird of the season was a pair of **Piping Plovers** that successfully raised one chick at Lakeview WMA. First noticed by Diana Whiting in early June, word of the Piping Plovers took a while to get out, but finally on 27 June Greg Lawrence, Liz Truskowski, and Michal Weaver from NYSDEC found a nest with two eggs. Unfortunately this nest was lost, probably during strong storms later that day, but only two days later a group led by Irene Mazzocchi found the female on a second nest about a mile south of the first one. Two chicks eventually fledged from this nest, with one surviving to independence. This was the first nest attempt on the New York shore of Lake Ontario since the early 1980s (see article, pp. 285-286).

The other avian highlight of the summer was an adult male **Rufous Hummingbird** that spent two days at Eileen Cardinal's feeders in the town of Hopkinton. Few birders were able to see this hummingbird, but fortunately Nick Leone and Eileen Wheeler were able to document the bird and get some photos. Rounding out the season's rarities was a **Nelson's Sparrow** Nick Leone heard singing on the night of 19 June at French Creek WMA. Although there are very few records of Nelson's Sparrow in Region 6, it seems possible that this species could occur with some regularity and is simply missed because of the scarcity of birders and an abundance of potential habitat.

Once again this summer, numerous Golden-winged Warblers with very few Blue-winged Warblers were found in the lake and ridge country of northeastern Jefferson County and adjacent St. Lawrence County, but Blue-winged Warblers outnumbered Golden-winged Warblers to the south and west. It certainly appears that Blue-winged Warblers will soon entirely replace Golden-winged Warblers in southern Jefferson County, but there is some hope that the Indian River Lakes area may act as a refugium for Golden-winged Warblers. Other notable warbler sightings included a Louisiana Waterthrush at the Lake of the Woods, in an area where this species has apparently occurred for several years, and a very late, well-seen Louisiana Waterthrush at Lakeview WMA on 28 August. An apparent pair of Wilson's Warblers Dennis Vroman found at Stony Point on 28 June seems out of place, but there have been several summer Wilson's Warbler reports from the Lake Ontario shoreline the past few years that were thought to have been misidentifications; in light of this year's report, it is worth considering the possibility that this species may be nesting in small numbers in western Jefferson County.

Rare grassland birds were something of a mixed bag this summer, with every species that regularly nests in Region 6 present but some in very low numbers. Upland Sandpipers were especially scarce and seem to be barely holding on as a breeding species, with about five pairs total noted from Ashland Flats WMA and Fort Drum and just one other sighting before late July. Three

pairs of Short-eared Owls nested on Fort Drum, with at least one and almost certainly two pairs fledging young, for the first confirmed breeding in Jefferson County in several years. At least 21 Sedge Wrens were found at five locations, of which 13 territorial males were on Fort Drum. Henslow's Sparrow surveys turned up high counts of 13 males at Perch River WMA, 11 at two privately owned fields enrolled in a NYSDEC landowner incentive program, and seven at Fort Drum.

The four Orchard Oriole reports this summer include one confirmed and two probable nesting records, and, in combination with observations from the past few years, clearly indicates an increasing population. Orchard Orioles are now firmly established in western Jefferson County and appear to be moving up the St. Lawrence River. No Rusty Blackbirds were reported in Region 6 this summer, but coverage in the St. Lawrence County portion of the Adirondacks was poor except for Massawepie Mire, which always attracts numerous visitors, and Cranberry Lake Biological Station. A few Pine Siskins were reported from the Adirondacks, and presumably Red Crossbills were present as well, although the only crossbills I know of were seen on Fort Drum during early June.

Notable this summer was the presence of an unusually large number of birders and bird biologists in Region 6. A Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology project looking at Golden-winged Warbler and Blue-winged Warbler genetics on Fort Drum brought half a dozen field ornithologists to the Region for the summer, and two more biologists studied Whip-poor-wills on the installation. Greg Lawrence studied grassland birds on the St. Lawrence River for a graduate project, in the process turning up a good number of interesting birds. Noah Strycker even spent a day in Jefferson County as part of his quest to set a new global big year record. He was accompanied by Marshall Illiff and Tom Schulenberg from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology on a successful visit for Henslow's Sparrow.

For the season I received reports of 215 species, easily besting any previous summer tally during the dozen years that I have been the full-time Region 6 editor. The combination of an unusually robust shorebird list thanks to the low water at Perch River, a better than usual mix of rarities, and the presence of numerous visiting birders accounts for the high species tally. Although there were several options to choose from as the season's best bird, the return of Piping Plover as a breeding species to the Lake Ontario shoreline has to be the absolute highlight of the season, and it is hoped that this species is back to stay.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFWMA – Ashland Flats WMA; CB – Chaumont Barrens preserve, T Clayton; CV – T Cape Vincent; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; ICNC – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton; JCSP – Jacques Cartier SP; KC – Kelsey Creek, T Watertown; LGI – Little Galloo I; LPt – Leonard Pd trail, T Colton; LRUD – Low’s Ridge-Upper Dam trail, T Piercefield; LWMA – Lakeview WMA, T Ellisburg; MM – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; PtPen – Point Peninsula; SLR – St. Lawrence Ri; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WISP – Wellesley I SP.

WHISTLING-DUCKS - VULTURES

Snow Goose: T Clayton 3 Jun (NL), only report.

Brant: apparently injured PtPen 25 Jul (EN, ph!), only report.

Mute Swan: up to 7/day PRWMA thru; 5 T Clayton 27 Jun, only other location.

Trumpeter Swan: 2-3/day PRWMA thru; max 4 ULLWMA 5 Jun; only locations.

Wood Duck: max 34 PRWMA 7 Jun.

Gadwall: max 6 WHWMA 15 Jun.

Am. Wigeon: 4 PRWMA 27 Jun, only report before Aug; max 12 PRWMA 22 Aug.

Am. Black Duck: broods JCSP & PRWMA.

Blue-winged Teal: 1-2/day Jun & Jul AFWMA, PRWMA, & WHWMA; no other reports until Aug; max 23 PRWMA 29 Aug.

N. Shoveler: sev reports 1-5 PRWMA thru; 2 WHWMA 8 Jun (GL); f with 5 yng AFWMA 26 Jun (DM).

N. Pintail: 2 PRWMA 12 & 13 Aug; 2 WHWMA 23 Aug; only reports.

Green-winged Teal: max 29 WHWMA 16 Jun, high; other reports from AFWMA, PRWMA, & Ogdén Island.

Redhead: 70 WHWMA 30 Aug, only report.

Ring-necked Duck: max 64 ULLWMA 29 Aug; sev Jun & Jul reports PRWMA where breeding has not been documented.

Bufflehead: ad m Perch Lake thru (mob).

Com. Merganser: PRWMA 2 Jul, unusual summer location.

Red-breasted Merganser: 2 CV 5 Jun, only report.

Ruffed Grouse: many broods reported suggesting high productivity after dismal nest success previous two breeding seasons.

Spruce Grouse: MM 3 Jul (PL, SM), only report.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 24 ULLWMA 29 Aug, low; also unusually scarce at WHWMA where water levels lowered for vegetation management; 19 Matoon Marsh FD 7 Aug, high count, more than usual.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 2264 nests LGI 19 Jun.

Am. Bittern: 2-6/day in damp old fields FD; many reports AFWMA & PRWMA.

Least Bittern: reports from AFWMA, FD, PRWMA, ULLWMA, WHWMA, Wilson Bay Marsh, & and one private marsh.

Great Egret: 1-2/day AFWMA thru 4 Aug; 1-2/day PRWMA Jun & Jul increased to 5-11/day Aug; max 14 O’Neil Road swamp T Norfolk 6 Aug.

Green Heron: max 6 PRWMA 16 Aug.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: max 63 PRWMA 5 Jul (LE).

Turkey Vulture: max about 100 T Wilna 8 Jun.

HAWKS - LARIDS

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 8 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 11 reports.

N. Goshawk: nests FD & LPt, only reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: 9 reports from all portions of Region.

Virginia Rail: max 5 ULLWMA 14 Aug.

Sora: max 3 AFWMA 7 Jun.

Com. Gallinule: max 30 PRWMA 7 Jun; other high counts include 19 AFWMA 26 Jun & 19 FD 7 Aug.

Am. Coot: AFWMA 7-10 Jun; 2 PRWMA 29 Jun - 5 Jul; only reports.

Sandhill Crane: T Hammond (JB, GL), only report.

Black-bellied Plover: last 8 WHWMA 6 Jun; 1-3/day PRWMA 2 Aug thru.

Am. Golden-Plover: sev reports PRWMA 19-27 Aug.

Semipalmated Plover: last WHWMA 8 Jun; max 60 PRWMA 3 Aug.

PIPING PLOVER: pr fledged 1 yng LWMA, first nesting Lake Ontario since 1984 (IM, GL, ET, mob).

Killdeer: max 185 PRWMA 19 Aug.

Greater Yellowlegs: max 40 PRWMA 3 Aug.

Lesser Yellowlegs: max 70 PRWMA 3 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: at least 3 pr FD & 2 ad AFWMA, only Jun reports; T Ogdensburg 4 Jul, only other report before late Jul; 2 T Madrid 31 July, certainly migr; T Clayton 7 Aug, possibly migr but in traditional nesting area.

Ruddy Turnstone: WHWMA 8 Jun (GL), only report.

Stilt Sandpiper: PRWMA 13-16 Aug; 2 PRWMA 22-26 Aug.

Sanderling: 4 PRWMA 19 Aug; max 11 LWMA 22 Aug; WHWMA 23 Aug.

Baird's Sandpiper: single juv PRWMA 7, 13, 22 & 27 Aug; max 5 PRWMA 28-29 Aug (JB, mob).

Least Sandpiper: max 367 PRWMA 21 Aug.

White-rumped Sandpiper: ad PRWMA 12 Aug, only report.

Pectoral Sandpiper: max 31 PRWMA 13 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: 3 WHWMA 8 Jun;

WHWMA 23 Jun; max 69 PRWMA 19 Aug.

WESTERN SANDPIPER: juv PRWMA 10, 13, 28-29 Aug (JB, NL, ph!).

Short-billed Dowitcher: 5 rep 1-2 PRWMA 23 Jul - 26 Aug; max 4 WHWMA 30 Aug.

Red-necked Phalarope: PRWMA 13 & 21 Aug, only reports.

Bonaparte's Gull: 2 PtPen 21 Jun; 2 Lakeview WMA 27-29 Jun; next report 2 WHWMA 31 Jul.

Herring Gull: max 784 nests LGI.

Caspian Tern: 2084 nests LGI, 15% lower than record-high count in 2014.

Black Tern: high counts 40 PRWMA 7 Jun; 31 ULLWMA 3 Jul; 7 AFWMA 9 Jul.

Com. Tern: modern record-high 1552 nests SLR between Lake Ontario and Massena, all but 77 on NYS side river (LH); 30+ nests LGI Jun, included at least one with chicks.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: 12 rep, more than usual for a year without a major tent caterpillar outbreak.

Black-billed Cuckoo: 1-3/day FD.

E. Screech-Owl: 6 rep, more than usual likely reflecting increased observer effort.

Com. Nighthawk: WHWMA 4 Jun & Ogden Island 7 Jun, possibly late migr; 2-8/day FD Jun & Jul, only other rep before Aug; about a dozen rep migr 15 Aug thru; max 87 Antwerp & Gouverneur 22 Aug.

E. Whip-poor-will: max 38 on 10 stop survey route FD 26 Jun (KS); 26 on approx 10-mile route Macomb & Theresa 9 Jul (JB).

RUFIOUS HUMMINGBIRD: Hopkinton feeder 22-23 Jul (EC, NL, EW, ph!, reports to NYSARC).

Red-headed Woodpecker: T Clayton 10 Jun; LWMA 2 Jul; only reports away from FD where 9-10 pairs nested.

Merlin: more than 50 rep; well established as a breeder throughout.

Peregrine Falcon: nest with 3 chicks Payne Lake 7 Jun (JB, GL); several reports SLR in locations suggesting number of nesting pairs along river increasing; family group hazing PRWMA shorebirds frequently Aug.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: last T Gouverneur 7 Jun; MM 16 Jul only Jun or Jul report from breeding habitat; FD at about 800 feet elevation 5 Aug, likely early fall migr or wanderer rather than local breeder; late Aug reports from Tug Hill & Cranberry Lake.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: < 10 reports from breeding sites, probably reflecting poor coverage of Adirondacks and Tug Hill.

Philadelphia Vireo: Wanakena BBS 6 Jun, only rep before late Aug; Tug Hill 26 Aug, only other report.

Horned Lark: singles PRWMA & T Lyme 7 Jun & FD 8 Aug; only reports.

Sedge Wren: T Dekalb 7 Jun (GL, JB); 13 territorial males FD thru; NYSDEC personnel found 4 PtPen, 1 Chaumont, & 2 Hammond.

Carolina Wren: FD 4 Jun; WISP 5 Jul; only reports.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: 12 rep, about typical.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: LRUD 12 Jun; T Childwold 31 Jul; only reports.

N. Mockingbird: 1-2/day FD; singles BI 26 Jun, LWMA 27 Jun, WISP 13 Aug, & KC 22 Aug.

Swainson's Thrush: only 6 Adirondack & Tug Hill rep indicates scanty coverage of breeding areas; migr LWMA 22 Aug & ICNC 29 Aug.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Louisiana Waterthrush: 2 Lake of the Woods T Theresa 9 Jul (JB); LWMA 28 Aug (JB!), late.

Golden-winged Warbler: one-day max 18 Indian River Lakes area 7 Jun (JB, GL), where only 2 Blue-winged Warblers reported all season.

Blue-winged Warbler: continuing to increase S & W Jefferson County including FD, *intro*.

Tennessee Warbler: arr T Hammond 6 Aug.

Hooded Warbler: Winona SF 14 Jun, only report.

Cape May Warbler: arr MM & Cranberry Lake 22 Aug; FD 24 Aug, only other report.

Cerulean Warbler: 4 Whetstone Gulf State Park 12 Jun (MR); max 8 Indian River Lakes area 7 Jun (JB, GL); 5 Long Pond Lewis County 4 Jul (MR); 5 FD early Jul (JB); more than usual.

N. Parula: arr ICNC 29 Aug; only report outside Adirondack breeding area.

Bay-breasted Warbler: arr ICNC 29 Aug.

Blackpoll Warbler: last Ogden Island 15 Jun.

"Yellow" Palm Warbler: 5 LRUD 12 Jun; max 27 MM 12 Jul; only reports.

"Western" Palm Warbler: arr WHWMA 23 Aug.

Prairie Warbler: 1-5/day CB Jun & Jul; T Hammond 6 Jun, new loc; max 10 FD 26 Jun.

Wilson's Warbler: pr StPt 28 Jun (DV, *intro*); arr ICNC 29 Aug.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: one-day max 44 FD 5 Jul, would have been more had thunderstorms not cut survey effort short (JB); 3 Galop Island 2 Jun (GL); T Leray 5 Jun (JB); up to 4/day CB and nearby Vanalstyne Road Jun thru 5 Jul (mob); CV 2 Jul (NL).

Vesper Sparrow: 10-30/day in open sandy areas FD thru; CV 3 Aug & WISP 9 Aug, only other reports (DM).

Grasshopper Sparrow: 6-20/day in open sandy areas FD thru; 1-3/day PRWMA Jun & Jul; 2 Galop Island 2 Jun (GL); Ogden Island 22 Jun (GL).

Henslow's Sparrow: max 13 on NYSDEC surveys PRWMA; 11 in 2 fields enrolled in NYSDEC landowner incentive program Jefferson County; 7 FD thru; no other reports.

NELSON'S SPARROW: nocturnal song French Creek WMA 19 Jun (NL).

Lincoln's Sparrow: max 15 MM 3 Jul; only 1 other report reflecting scanty coverage Adirondacks.

Dark-eyed Junco: Coyote Flats WMA 7 Jun (MI, TL, TS); CB 9 Jun (JD); FD 12 Jun (LT); 5 WISP 8 Aug (JA); more rep than usual from outside Adirondack and Tug Hill.

Orchard Oriole: Galop Island 2 Jun (GL); FD 12 Jun (JB), PRWMA 29 Jun (JB); pr + 2 yng & 2nd ad m T Ellisburg 24 Jul (SDR); well established near Lake Ontario & increasing along St. Lawrence River.

Baltimore Oriole: many moving early Aug; max 23+ in one tree FD 6 Aug; scarce by end Aug.

Red Crossbill: Fort Drum 5 & 11 Jun, only reports.

Pine Siskin: Cranberry Lake 6 Jun, CB 7 Jun, FD 11 Jun, & MM 3 Jul; only reports.

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