

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SPRING 2016

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Among the many rare and regionally significant birds recorded this spring, several stand out for me, in part because they occurred in interesting groupings. The trifecta of a Western Willet, three Short-billed Dowitchers, and an American Avocet observed on 17 May in Washington County would have been an exciting find anywhere in the state; in the context of Region 8's challenging shorebirding environment, they were particularly noteworthy. The same is true regarding the duo of a Western Willet and a Marbled Godwit found via Greg Lawrence's exceptional effort and tenacity in Region 6. Had these two birds not been there on 22 May, Greg might have lost a bit of enthusiasm for such work, but following these rewards, we can be sure he'll keep at it. Furthermore, these records helped to refine our very incomplete understanding of the migratory status of Western Willet in New York State—as did the unusual number of reports from Region 3.

At another end of the Empire State, Region 1's exceptionally long and deep ornithological history was shaken up by the appearance of **two Western Tanagers**—tripling the Region's tally of documented records. And these were just part of the story of this species this season. Another continued from winter at Cornell University in Region 3, finally departing on 3 April; and another was at a Region 9 feeder 23 March-10 April, sharing similar timing with the Ithaca bird and further explaining why this and other other western vagrants are often found at migrant traps in early to mid April.

In central New York, Piping Plovers have shown an uptick in occurrence and breeding activity on the eastern shores of Lake Ontario, as shown again this spring. And one on Oneida Lake this season (just the third record there) hints at the potential for more records of upstate migrants in the future.

Region 10 always records lots of rare birds, owing to its geography and demography. Even as this pattern engenders much racing around by year-listers, it also contributes to a sort of sanguine (or is it envious?) resignation among the patch-birding purists, as well as a mesmerized (or is it stupefied?) inertia among the arm-chair birders struggling to keep up with things. Regardless, everyone had to marvel at this spring's trio of warbler megas: **Audubon's**, **Swainson's**, and **Hermit**! This writer certainly did, despite not seeing any of them, and notwithstanding certain sanguine (and stupefied) tendencies.

All of these examples of potential Birds of the Season owe part of their impact to numbers, as components of interesting groupings. This advantage

was not shared by Region 2's **Gray Kingbird**, nor by Region 9's **Bullock's Oriole**. These were simply remarkable birds.

But my choice for Bird of the Season for Spring 2016 exhibited personal qualities far beyond its rarity, which was admittedly on a slightly lower scale than some of the birds mentioned above. In terms of beauty, charisma, and cooperativeness, Broome County's long-staying **Yellow-headed Blackbird** will surely remain one of Region 4's most memorable rarities for years to come. Found by Jonathan Weeks on 2 April and seen and heard by many visitors to Boland Pond over several weeks, this was for many an unforgettable bird.



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