

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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It was a very dry summer, and, although the season's precipitation total in Watertown was only 1.7 inches below normal, signs of drought were obvious everywhere. By the beginning of summer many small ponds and wetlands were entirely dry thanks to the winter's lack of snow and a very dry spring. June and August were both modestly wetter than normal, each month receiving a little less than one inch more precipitation than average, but just 0.4 inches of rain fell on Watertown during July. Temperatures relative to normal increased through the summer, from within one degree of normal in June to 3-6 degrees above normal in August.

Dry conditions were obvious everywhere away from the Lake Ontario shoreline and the St. Lawrence River. A visit to almost any small pond or wetland was likely to reveal a completely dry expanse of mud and an absence of waterfowl and other wetland birds. Most larger bodies of water were lower than anybody could remember seeing them, lined with extensive mudflats that dried up as the summer progressed. Given the lack of water everywhere else, it was odd to see very high water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River throughout the summer as water was held back at the dams on the river.

I heard a few anecdotal reports from birders and hunters who thought that Mallard numbers were unusually low, but waterfowl and waterbird reports otherwise seemed mostly typical. Most summer duck reports come from a few large wetland complexes that did not entirely dry up, and a more thorough sampling of the Region's wetland habitats may well have revealed a significant scarcity of waterbirds. Perhaps because of a lack of water elsewhere, unusually large numbers of Mallards and Blue-winged Teal were at Perch River WMA in August. Several observers commented on apparently high productivity for Ruffed Grouse and Wild Turkey, attributing the perceived high nesting success to a dry spring.

Sandhill Crane reports continue to increase, but the precise number of breeding pairs in Region 6 remains unclear. Adults with colts were seen in two locations, one in the town of Madrid near the Lisbon Swamp, where nesting has been suspected for nearly 10 years, and one at Wilson Hill WMA, where there had been no summer sightings until this family group appeared in August. Although the origin of this later group is unknown, there is another recent record of a family group from the town of Louisville less than five miles from Wilson Hill, near extensive swamps on private property that could support a nesting pair. Additional June and July sightings from the towns of Lyme and Theresa may represent unknown nesting sites, the latter location being near an area in Hammond with multiple crane reports in past years. Combined with locations where nesting has been confirmed or suspected over the past few years,

observations from this year suggest the presence of between 3 and 10 nesting sites in Region 6.

Low water at PRWMA led to decent concentrations of shorebirds for the second consecutive year, although this year the lack of water was natural and not related to management. The most unusual shorebird at Perch River was a Buff-breasted Sandpiper on 25 August, the first reported in Region 6 since 2011. Other species at Perch River that are infrequently observed in Region 6 included Stilt Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalarope. Few shorebird reports came from elsewhere, including Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River where habitat was largely underwater. However, a pair of **Piping Plovers** returned to Lakeview WMA after last year's historic successful nesting attempt, but unfortunately their nest failed this year, after which the plovers were not seen again.

Not surprisingly given the drought, Sedge Wrens were unusually scarce, but numbers of other grassland birds appeared to be comparable to recent years. The eight Upland Sandpipers Alan Belford found in Clayton on 29 June is roughly equivalent to the total number reported each of the past few nesting seasons in Region 6, but this species was only seen in three other locations. About 17 male Henslow's Sparrows were reported from four locations, also roughly typical for the past few years. Most of these Henslow's Sparrows were at just two sites: Perch River WMA and a private field enrolled in a NYSDEC landowner incentive program. This program is being phased out, which could well contribute to further declines in Jefferson County's already very small Henslow's Sparrow population.

The only real passerine rarity of the season was an **Acadian Flycatcher** that was singing above Greg Lawrence's tent at Coles Creek State Park on the morning of 2 June. While not quite a rarity, Yellow-billed Cuckoo tends to be scarce in Region 6 most years, so the 22 reports from this summer were noteworthy. During the early summer, tent caterpillars seemed to be more abundant than they have been since the end of a massive outbreak more than a decade ago, which could explain the high number of Yellow-billed Cuckoos. However, Black-billed Cuckoo numbers seemed very similar to the past two years.

Once again Golden-winged Warblers received a great deal of attention by visiting birders and biologists. As in the past few years, Blue-winged Warblers are well established and now outnumber Golden-winged Warblers south of a line running roughly from just north of Fort Drum through the brushland of northwestern Jefferson County, including Chaumont Barrens and other alvar communities. North of this line Blue-winged Warblers remain scarce, although many hybrids occur, especially in the St. Lawrence Valley lowlands. The only area where Golden-winged Warblers occur with few Blue-winged Warblers or obvious hybrids is the Indian River Lakes Region and adjacent areas characterized by numerous, narrow ridges and valleys. This account is all based

on observations of phenotypes, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology continues to study the genetics of birds in this area.

Throughout the summer there were indications of some bird movements that don't fit in with typical spring or summer migrations. From 15 June through at least early August I found Red-breasted Nuthatches on several dates in small patches of deciduous trees or other places where nesting seems highly unlikely and suspect that these birds were part of a southward movement out of Canada. On 18 June one of these nuthatches was near two late migrant Yellow-bellied Flycatchers in willow patch on Fort Drum. Pine Siskins and Red Crossbills also put in widely scattered appearances in places where they did not likely nest, although the source for these birds is not clear.

The usual trickle of southbound Eastern Kingbirds, Yellow Warblers, Bobolinks, Baltimore Orioles, and other early migrants was evident throughout August, but on most days there was little sign of any significant migration. The only real exception was a large fallout featuring many passerine species that Alan Belford witnessed on the Tug Hill on 31 August. Otherwise small numbers of migrants were seen most days but usually just one or a few individuals at a time, with no large migrants flocks noted.

For the season, I received reports of 207 species, a good tally for Region 6 although eight species shy of last summer's unusually high total. The best bird of the season was the Acadian Flycatcher at Coles Creek State Park, but as with so many rarities in Region 6 it was only seen by one or two birders. Particularly disappointing was the failure of the Piping Plover nest at Lakeview WMA, but given the apparently increasing population on Lake Ontario there remains hope that this species will once again become a regular member of the Region 6 avifauna.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFWMA – Ashland Flats WMA; BPWMA – Black Pd WMA; CB – Chaumont Barrens preserve, T Clayton; CCSP – Coles Creek SP; CV – T Cape Vincent; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; JEFF – Jefferson County; LGI – Little Galloo I; LPT – Leonard Pd trail, T Colton; LWMA – Lakeview WMA, T

Ellisburg; MM – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; PilPt – Pillar Pt; PRGC – Partridge Run Golf Course, T Canton; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; SBSP – Southwick Beach SP; SLR – St. Lawrence Ri; STLA – St. Lawrence County; TMB – Three Mile Bay, T Lyme; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WGSP—Whetstone Gulf SP; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

Snow Goose: T Watertown 8 Aug (BMi).

Mute Swan: max 18 PRWMA 20 Jul.

Trumpeter Swan: 2 Mud Lake T DePeyster 9 Aug, only report away from PRWMA & ULLWMA nesting sites.

Wood Duck: max 190 PRWMA 27 Aug.

Gadwall: max 12 PRWMA 31 Jul.

Am. Wigeon: max 10 PRWMA 22 Aug.

Am. Black Duck: max 20 T Waddington 27 Aug.

Mallard: max 1240 PRWMA 25 Aug.

Blue-winged Teal: max 95 PRWMA 25 Aug.

N. Shoveler: 5 T Lyme 31 Jul (RB), only report.

N. Pintail: max 3 WHWMA 28 Aug.

Green-winged Teal: max 36 WHWMA 28 Aug.

Redhead: arr WHWMA 17 Aug, where max 15 there 31 Aug.

Ring-necked Duck: m TMB thru Jul, unusual location; max 74 ULLWMA 27 Aug.

Com. Goldeneye: Cranberry L 30 Jul (AB), only report.

Com. Merganser: 16 reports Adirondacks, L Ontario & SLR.

Ruffed Grouse: many broods reported suggesting excellent reproduction.

Spruce Grouse: Bog River Fall 18 Jul (AN), only report.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 45 ULLWMA 27 Aug; 41 FD 18 Aug.

Am. Bittern: 3-9/day in damp old fields FD Jun & Jul.

Least Bittern: reports from FD, PRWMA, ULLWMA, WHWMA & Wilson's Bay CV.

Great Egret: max 30 O'Neil Rd swamp T Massena 24 Jul, such numbers not unusual NE STLA; 17/day PRWMA late Aug high for JEFF.

Green Heron: max 8 T Lyme 16 Jul & PRGC 30 Jul.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: max 31 PRWMA 17 Jul.

HAWKS - LARIDS

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 8 reports.

Cooper's Hawk: 18 reports.

N. Goshawk: several reports T Colton & Piercefield Jun & Jul.

Red-shouldered Hawk: 25+ widely scattered reports.

Virginia Rail: 14 reports from 5 locations.

Sora: only 3 reports, very low.

Com. Gallinule: max 23 Matoon Creek Marsh FD 13 Jul, where more than usual for 2nd consecutive year.

Am. Coot: T Lyme 16 Jul (SK, BS, CW), only report.

Sandhill Crane: T Hounsfield 6 Jun (AB); T Theresa 18 Jun (BM, LM); 2 AFWMA T Lyme 18 Jun (WH); 2 T Lyme 31 Jul (RB); PRWMA 8 Aug thru (mob); 2 ad & 1 y T Madrid 20 Aug (TW, EW); 3-4/day WHWMA 18 Aug thru (HW, mob).

Black-bellied Plover: last spring migrant WHWMA 2 Jun; 6 reports 1-2 PRWMA 8 Aug.

Am. Golden-Plover: ad WHWMA 28 Aug (JB, BD), only report.

Semipalmated Plover: last 2 spring migrants WHWMA 2 Jun; up to 10/day PRWMA & WHWMA Aug.

PIPING PLOVER: nest attempt same LWMA area as 2015 failed, adults not seen again (IM).

Killdeer: max 40 PRWMA 25 Aug.

Greater Yellowlegs: last spring migrant FD 1 Jun; max 35 PRWMA 24 Aug.

Lesser Yellowlegs: CV 2 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: 6 reports of up to 8 T Clayton Jun & Jul; T Lyme 16 Jul; T Rutland 22 Jul; at least 6 territories FD Jun.

Stilt Sandpiper: PRWMA 22-27 Aug (mob), only report.

Sanderling: 2-3/day WHWMA 28-31 Aug; 2 BPWMA 30 Aug.

Baird's Sandpiper: 1-2/day PRWMA 25-27 Aug, only reports.

Least Sandpiper: max 22 PRWMA 26 Aug.

White-rumped Sandpiper: PRWMA 25-26 Aug, only reports.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: PRWMA 25 Aug (JB), rare R6.

Pectoral Sandpiper: 5 reports singles PRWMA 3 Jul thru.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: last spring migrant WHWMA 2 Jun; max 13 PRWMA 22 Aug.

Short-billed Dowitcher: 2 PRWMA 14 Aug; PRWMA 25 Aug; only reports.

Wilson's Phalarope: PRWMA 29 Aug (JC), only report.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 17 PilPt 1 Aug.

Herring Gull: 971 nests LGI.

Caspian Tern: 2354 nests LGI 3 Jun.

Black Tern: up to 50/day PRWMA Jun; 26 ULLWMA 12 Jun; 4 Wilson's Bay march CV 30 Jun & 17 Jul; 31 AFWMA 17 Jul.

Com. Tern: 1272 nests SLR (LH), 20 nests LGI where population slowly increasing.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: 22 reports most since 2011.

Black-billed Cuckoo: 37 reports, comparable to previous 2 summers.

E. Screech-Owl: T Rossie 17 Jul & T Alexandria 31 Jul, only reports.

N. Saw-whet Owl: Pleasant Valley SF 8 Aug (GM), only report.

Com. Nighthawk: Sherman L 1 Jul, only Jun or Jul report away from FD; max 26 T Watertown 27 Aug.

E. Whip-poor-will: up to 35/night in traditional strongholds FD, CB, T Clayton & Indian River Lakes.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 10-11 territories FD.

Merlin: about 30 reports from throughout R6.

Peregrine Falcon: 1-2/day PRWMA 27 Jul thru; FD 28 Jul; WHWMA 22 Aug; T Hounsfield 29 Aug; T Hammond 31 Aug.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: last obvious spring migrant FD 2 Jun; 9 reports from SE STLA representing local breeders; 3 T Potsdam 23 Aug.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: late migrant FD 18 Jun; 13 reports from nesting habitat SE STLA; max 8 Sevey Bog T Colton 17 Jun; migrant SBSP 27 Aug.

ACADIAN FLYCATCHER (R6): CCSP 2 Jun (GL!).

Willow Flycatcher: max 18 FD 29 Jun.

Philadelphia Vireo: Tooley Pond Rd T Clare & Clifton July 11 & 17, only breeding season reports; 5 reports migrants 27-31 Aug.

Red-breasted Nuthatch: scattered apparent migrants or dispersing birds in deciduous woodland where nesting unlikely FD 15 Jun thru at least mid-Jul.

Sedge Wren: 1 FD 3 Jun to 9 Aug, where only male until 2 more arr immediate vicinity 28 Jul;

4th m FD about 8 km from previous location; PRWMA 7 Jul; fewest since at least 2000.

Carolina Wren: 2 T Watertown 16 Jul, only report.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: 4 reports Jun & Jul, low; last SBSP 27 Aug.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: T Parishville 26 Jun (JB); Dead Creek T Piercefield 29 Jun (GD); only reports.

E. Bluebird: 7 boxes CV & T Clayton fledged 44 y.

N. Mockingbird: max 4 FD 3 Jul; reports from 4 other locations.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Louisiana Waterthrush: 2 locations T Antwerp 17 Jul; WGSP 4 Jul, only other report.

Golden-winged Warbler: phenotypes visually confirmed for 56 FD thru.

Blue-winged Warbler: phenotypes visually confirmed for 93 FD thru.

Tennessee Warbler: 4 reports 22-31 Aug.

Hooded Warbler: max 4 T Ellisburg 6 Jun (NL).

Cerulean Warbler: 3 m at 2 sites FD Jun; 11 m at 7 sites Indian River Lakes area Jun & Jul (mob); 2 sites T Croghan Jul (MR); 3 T Dekalb NE known nesting site R6.

N. Parula: T Redwood 18 Jun (BM); PRWMA 31 Jul (SK); rare outside Adirondacks & Tug Hill Jun & Jul.

Bay-breasted Warbler: 3 reports 31 Aug.

Blackpoll Warbler: max 10 WGSP 31 Aug.

Palm Warbler: max 17 MM 9 Jul.

Prairie Warbler: max 15 FD 25 Jun; T Rossie 17 Jul, only report away from primary breeding areas at FD & NW JEFF.

Black-throated Green Warbler: max approx. 100 Lesser Wilderness SF 31 Aug.

Wilson's Warbler: 4 reports 1-2/day 27-31 Aug.

TANAGERS - WEAVERS

Clay-colored Sparrow: T Clayton 1 Jun (NL); T Canton 19 Jun (JB); 3 Galop Is 23 Jun (GL); Tug Hill SF 4 Jul (WF); 4 T Henderson 16 Jul (SK, BS, CW); max 29 FD 24 Jun.

Vesper Sparrow: max 55 FD 3 Jul; PRWMA 11 Jul, only report away from FD.

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 24 FD 3 Jul; 11 reports elsewhere W JEFF; Galop Is 24 Jun & T Hammond 30 Jun, only reports outside JEFF.

Henslow's Sparrow: Tubelino Road T Orleans 29 Jun (AB); 3-4 FD thru; max 7 PRWMA Jul; 6 Clayton field enrolled in DEC landowner incentive program.

Lincoln's Sparrow: Bonaparte Swamp Preserve 24 Jul (TA), likely at edge regular R6 breeding range.

Orchard Oriole: Galop Is 24 Jun (GL); T Henderson 16 Jul (SK, BS, CW); migrant FD 26 Aug.

Red Crossbill: MM 18 Jun (AB); Glen Meal SF 5 Jul (JB); Pleasant Valley SF 9 Aug (GM, RS).

Pine Siskin: max 5 T Croghan 2 Jun; 5 other reports Jun; FD 7 Jul & T Lowville 6 Aug, only reports after Jun.

Evening Grosbeak: 2 T Parishville 4 Jun; 2 T Pinckney 17 Jun; only reports.