

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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The summer was very wet, with mean temperatures that were within one degree of normal all three months. June was particularly wet, and the 6.2" of rain that fell on Watertown was more than twice the monthly average. Monthly precipitation totals declined to 4.8" in July and 4.1" in August, tallies that were 2.1" and 1.0" above normal, respectively. Spring was very wet also, so water was everywhere at the beginning of June, and water levels were high on virtually every stream and body of water in Region 6 all summer.

Record high water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River declined only slightly by August. As a result, virtually no shoreline was exposed along the Jefferson County lakeshore or the St. Lawrence River, and with one exception almost no shorebird reports came from these areas. The exception was the stretch of the St. Lawrence River between the Iroquois Dam and Moses-Saunders Dam, where management by the power authority resulted in very low water levels after mid-August, exposing a surprising amount of mudflat given how much water was everywhere else.

Many islands on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River were at least partially flooded through the nesting season, but this flooding did not necessarily result in fewer birds at nesting islands. Despite half of the island being underwater, a record high 2671 Ring-billed Gull nests were counted at the Murphy Island colony in the St. Lawrence River. In some cases changes in numbers likely had little to do with water levels. For instance, the apparent

abandonment this year of Gull Island by nesting Black-crowned Night-Herons was most likely related to a dramatic increase in the number of Double-crested Cormorants nesting on the island. High water also did not seem to cause Caspian Terns at Little Galloo Island any problems, as the 2511 nests counted there on 8 June was another record high. By contrast, Common Tern nests on the St. Lawrence River declined for the first time since 2010, likely a result of management actions, or inaction, rather than water levels.

NYSDEC started draining the East Pool at Wilson Hill WMA this spring, and by July this pool was a vast expanse of mudflats with a narrow channel of water running through it. During July and much of August many shorebirds used these mudflats, including unusually high numbers of several species including Semipalmated Plover, Least Sandpiper, and Semipalmated Sandpiper. A shorebird fallout on 12 August following heavy thunderstorms the night before was especially impressive, with nearly 700 individuals of 12 species, high totals for a Region where shorebirds have become generally scarce. A Regionally rare **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was especially noteworthy on the 12th, and highlights during the subsequent ten days included up to five Baird's Sandpipers per day and a Red-necked Phalarope on 13 August. Shorebirds largely abandoned Wilson Hill in favor of mudflats along nearby portions of the St. Lawrence River when water levels on the river dropped in late August. Away from the Wilson Hill area, shorebirds were virtually unreported except for a modest number at Perch River WMA.

Grassland bird numbers seemed about typical for the past few years. Upland Sandpiper continues to hang on in low numbers, with approximately 11 territories at six locations. The 13 Sedge Wren territories on Fort Drum was about average for this location, but only five males were found elsewhere. At least 23 male Henslow's Sparrows were at three locations, but none were found on properties enrolled in a landowner incentive program that had been administered by NYSDEC. This program was discontinued two years ago, which is a shame as it had shown great promise for Henslow's Sparrow management.

Several observers, most notably Linnea Rowse, surveyed various portions of Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties for Golden-winged Warblers, adding further evidence that the Indian River Lakes region is the stronghold for this species in northern New York. Unlike Fort Drum, where Blue-winged Warblers in 2017 were nearly twice as common as Golden-winged Warblers, many Golden-wings were found in the Indian River Lakes but few Blue-wings or hybrids were found. This same area is also the best area in Region 6 for Cerulean Warblers, as evidenced by the seasonal maximum of seven at Lonesome Bay State Forest on 5 June.

Red and White-winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins were all present in the Adirondacks this summer, although each species was reported only one or a few times. Type 2 Red Crossbills tend to be the most common type in northern New York, but Matt Young confirmed the presence of the locally rare Type 3 from a

recording submitted by Mandi Roggie of birds recorded near Croghan. All of these finches likely were more common than reports suggest, given the small number of observers that covered the Adirondack and Tug Hill portions of Region 6.

Unlike the last two years when the early fall migration was dismal, excellent numbers of songbirds, particularly warblers, were observed on Fort Drum during the last half of August. The first migrants first appeared on Fort Drum early, with two Cape May Warblers on 11 August. Migration was relatively slow until the last week of the month, when numerous large flocks were found, with notable high counts including 30 Bay-breasted Warblers on 29 August, 29 Magnolia Warblers on 30 August, and 15 Tennessee and 21 Cape May Warblers on 31 August. On the latter date a total of 23 warbler species was observed on Fort Drum, a high Region 6 tally for any day during fall migration.

This was an excellent summer for rarities in Region 6, especially during late June and early July on Fort Drum. On 24 June I found a **Dickcissel** during a grassland bird survey on Fort Drum and, while checking on this bird on 26 June, found a territorial Philadelphia Vireo in the nearest trees to the Dickcissel's favorite song perch. Both of these birds remained on territory for more than two weeks, but the female **Summer Tanager** I found on 29 June during a Red-headed Woodpecker survey in Fort Drum's oak woodlands was not found again. On 4 July, Alan Belford beat me to a **Chuck-will's-widow** by one day. This "chuck" was heard on 5 July at a nightjar survey plot and, assuming it was present, would almost certainly have been found earlier had every previous attempt to survey nightjars on Fort Drum not been cancelled by rain or in one case by nighttime military exercises. On 16 July, Jay McGowan found an **Acadian Flycatcher** at Lakeview WMA that remained for at least three more days. Perhaps the biggest surprise was an early **Northern Wheatear** a group of birders led by Alan Belford found at Wilson Hill WMA on 26 August, but unfortunately this wheatear was not found the following day.

For the season I received reports of 215 species, tying 2015 for the highest summer tally in Region 6 over the last 15 years. Potential highlights were numerous this season, given the relative abundance of rarities, the high number of shorebirds in the Wilson Hill area, and the excellent early songbird migration at least at Fort Drum. The almost total lack of shorebird habitat along the Lake Ontario was a low point, and the heavy rainfall and widespread flooding likely affected birds negatively in other ways as well.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CB – Chaumont Barrens preserve, T Clayton; CCSP – Coles Creek SP; CV – T Cape Vincent; FD – Fort Drum Military Reservation; IRL – Indian River Lakes; JEFF – Jefferson County; LBSF – Lonesome Bay State Forest, T Hammond; LGI – Little Galloo Island; LWMA – Lakeview WMA, T Ellisburg; MM – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; PRWMA – Perch River WMA; PtPen – Point Peninsula; RRT – Remington Recreation Trail, T Canton; SLR – St. Lawrence Ri; STLA – St. Lawrence County; StPt – Stony Pt, T Henderson; ULLWMA – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; WHWMA – Wilson Hill WMA; WISP – Wellesley I SP; WP – Whalen Park, T Louisville.

WATERFOWL - VULTURES

Brant: PRWMA 1 Jun (BM), only report.

Mute Swan: max 6 French Creek WMA 15 Jun.

Trumpeter Swan: 2 Hunneyman Marsh T Alexandria 7 Jun; Black L 9 Jun; T Rossie 16 Aug; multiple reports PRWMA & ULLWMA, where nesting known; increasing.

Wood Duck: max 41 ULLWMA 14 Jul.

Gadwall: max 7 PRWMA 13 Aug.

Am. Wigeon: 7 WHWMA 2-4 Jun & ULLWMA 13 Jul, only reports before Aug; max 12 WHWMA 26 Aug.

Am. Black Duck: max 8 Tooley Pond 1 Aug.

Mallard: max 500 SLR T Louisville 26 Aug.

Blue-winged Teal: only 3 reports singles anywhere other than PRWMA before Aug; max 12 PRWMA 17 Aug.

N. Shoveler: WHWMA 11 Jul; 8 PRWMA 27 Aug; only reports.

N. Pintail: 2 WHWMA 11 Jul & 27 Aug; only reports.

Green-winged Teal: none before Aug; max 18 WHWMA 26 Aug.

Redhead: arr WHWMA 26 Aug.

Ring-necked Duck: Soft Maple Reservoir 14 Jul, only report away from PRWMA, ULLWMA & WHWMA; max 30 ULLWMA 25 Jul.

Com. Goldeneye: Little Channel Is. SLR 3 Jul (GC), only report.

Hooded Merganser: max 13 PRWMA 13 Jul.

Com. Merganser: max 17 LWMA 10 Jul.

Red-breasted Merganser: 3 singles SLR 3-8 Jun, only reports.

Ruddy Duck: f WHWMA 4 Jun (JB); ad m Perch L 16 Aug (JB); only reports.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 25 PRWMA 25 Aug.

Red-necked Grebe: StPt 27 Aug (AS), only report.

Double-crested Cormorant: max 1999 nests LGI 15 Jun, numbers continuing to decline despite lack of DEC hazing 2016 & 2017; 508 nests Gull Island record high for location.

AM. WHITE PELICAN: 2 Guffin's Bay 27 Jun (CN, ph!).

Am. Bittern: 60+ reports; max 7 FD 7 Jun.

Least Bittern: singles T Alexandria, FD, PRWMA, WHWMA, Lisbon Swamp, and S Canton Road T Potsdam; chronically underreported because of limited access to best habitat.

Great Egret: 40 reports mostly at or near WHWMA & PRWMA; max 19 WP 27 Aug.

Green Heron: max 6 multiple locations.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: no nests Gull I, 1st year since counting began 1995; max 92 nests Murphy Is (IM).

Turkey Vulture: max 68 T West Carthage 12 Jun.

HAWKS - LARIDS

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 8 reports to eBird.

Cooper's Hawk: 30 reports to eBird.

N. Goshawk: 3 reports.

Red-shouldered Hawk: 10 reports, declining?

Virginia Rail: max 5 WHWMA 26 Aug.

Sora: T Depeyster 18 Jun; different sites Lisbon Swamp 4 Jun & 18 Jul; severely underreported.

Com. Gallinule: max 15 FD 28 Aug.

Sandhill Crane: T Leray 1 Jun (TdW); Cranberry L 15 Jun; 2 ad with 2 juv WHWMA 14 Aug thru (mob); only reports.

Black-bellied Plover: arr WHWMA 13 Jul; max 13 WHWMA 15 Aug; 3 singles PRWMA only reports elsewhere.

Am. Golden-Plover: WHWMA 15 Aug (JB), only report.

Semipalmated Plover: arr WHWMA 15 Jul; max 132 WHWMA 12 Aug.

Killdeer: max 60 WHWMA 26 Aug.

Spotted Sandpiper: max 5 multiple locations.

Solitary Sandpiper: 7 reports singles, low.

Greater Yellowlegs: arr WHWMA 11 Jul; max 10 WHWMA 26 Aug.

Lesser Yellowlegs: arr LWMA 9 Jul; max 35 WHWMA 27 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: 6 pair FD; reports from 5 other sites NW JEFF.

Sanderling: WHWMA 10 Aug, only report.

White-rumped Sandpiper: 2 WHWMA 29 Jul (JB), only report.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper: WHWMA 12 Aug (JB); early, rare R6.

Baird's Sandpiper: up to 5/day WHWMA 12-25 Aug; last 2 WP 26 Aug.

Least Sandpiper: arr WHWMA 11 Jul; max 460 WHWMA 12 Aug.

Pectoral Sandpiper: arr WHWMA 22 Jul; max 25 WHWMA 26 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: last spring migrants 20 WHWMA 2 Jun; southbound arr WHWMA 13 Jul; max 76 WHWMA 13 Aug.

Short-billed Dowitcher: 2 WHWMA 12-14 Aug; PRWMA 17-18 Aug; only reports.

Red-necked Phalarope: WHWMA 13 Aug (JB), only report.

Bonaparte's Gull: arr Perch L 20 Jul; max 185 Henderson Bay 20 Aug.

Ring-billed Gull: 2671 nests Murphy I record high despite flooding; no count LGI.

Herring Gull: max 579 nests LGI down from 971 in 2016.

Caspian Tern: 2511 nests LGI 8 Jun, record high (IM).

Black Tern: 47 pr at 5 sites JEFF on DEC survey incl max 17 pairs PRWMA; 21 pr STLA all at ULLWMA on DEC survey; 8 flying over FD fields 21 Jul.

Com. Tern: 1090 nests SLR lowest tally since 2010 (LH); high mortality at SLR nests Jun because of rain and cold.

PIGEONS - PARROTS

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: about 35 reports of at least 28 ind, high.

Black-billed Cuckoo: 46 reports FD, where max 4 multiple dates; at least 32 ind elsewhere; most since 2010.

E. Screech-Owl: 3 T Watertown 2 Jul, only report.

Long-eared Owl: T Pinckney 30 Jul (GS), only report.

Com. Nighthawk: Jun & Jul max 8 FD 10 Jun; T Watertown 19 Jun, only report before Aug away from FD (LR); southbound migrants arr T Canton 14 Aug; max 70 T Gouverneur & Dekalb 28 Jun.

CHUCK-WILL'S-WIDOW: FD 4-20 Jul (AB, JB, DW, WF, KM, BP), 1st regional report.

E. Whip-poor-will: max 70 on 4 10-stop survey routes FD 5 Jul.

Red-headed Woodpecker: 9-11 terr FD, only reports.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: increasing St. Lawrence Valley.

Merlin: 53 reports from throughout R6 indicating widespread nesting.

Peregrine Falcon: 7 reports from throughout R6.

FLYCATCHERS - WAXWINGS

Olive-sided Flycatcher: last obvious spring migrant LBSF 5 Jun; max 4 Five Ponds Wilderness 3 Jun; 5 reports migrants 18 Aug thru.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: arr RRt 15 Aug.

ACADIAN FLYCATCHER (R6): LWMA 16-19 Jul (JM, mob).

Alder Flycatcher: max 26 FD 15 Jun.

Willow Flycatcher: max 23 FD 21 Jul.

Philadelphia Vireo: terr m FD 26 Jun to 9 Jul (JB, mob), rare in summer outside Adirondacks; Jun & Jul reports from 3 sites in SE STLA, where local breeder; migrants arr FD 22 Aug.

Bank Swallow: 90 FD 3 Jul.

Sedge Wren: 4 terr FD early Jun increased to 8 early Jul & max 13 early Aug, including pair feeding juv 26 Jul; PRWMA 21 Jun, T Chaumont 19 Jul, & 3 sites N STLA Jul only other reports.

Carolina Wren: PtPen 13 Jun, T Norfolk 15 Jul & 2 Cranberry L 21 Jul, only reports.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: 10 reports Jun & Jul about typical; migrants FD 22, 25, & 29 Aug.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: 2 Dead Creek Flow 26 Aug (BB).

N. WHEATEAR: WHWMA 26 Aug (AB, JB, photos!), 1st county and 4th Regional record.

Swainson's Thrush: arr FD 25 Aug.

N. Mockingbird: 7+ terr FD; WI 24 Jun, T Lyme 28 Jun, & T Pamela 20 Aug, only other reports.

LONGSPURS - WARBLERS

Golden-winged Warbler: eBird reports of 45+ ind IRL where Blue-winged Warblers scarce.

Blue-winged Warbler: up to 9/day FD June; eBird reports of 3 ind IRL & Black Lake area; only 2 Jun reports N of Gouverneur, where still scarce as breeder.

“Brewster’s” Warbler: max 4 FD 15 Jun; singles T Theresa 9 Jun, LBSF 9 & 13 Jun, & CB 17-21 Jun.

“Lawrence’s” Warbler: FD 17 Jun, only report.

Tennessee Warbler: last spring migrant LBSF 5 Jun; fall migr arr CCSP 15 Aug; max 15 FD 31 Aug.

Com. Yellowthroat: max 68 FD 30 Jun.

Hooded Warbler: 2 T Osceola 3 Jun; max 3 Winona Experimental Forest 10 Jul.

Cape May Warbler: 2 arr FD 11 Aug, early; max 21 FD 31 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: max 7 LBSF 5 Jun.

N. Parula: Murray I 7 Aug (HM), early migr?; CCSP 15 Aug, more typical arr date.

Magnolia Warbler: arr FD 25 Aug; max 29 FD 30 Aug.

Bay-breasted Warbler: arr FD 22 Aug; max 30 FD 29 Aug.

Blackburnian Warbler: 10-13/day FD last week Aug.

Chestnut-sided Warbler: max 40 FD 3 Jun.

Blackpoll Warbler: last northbound T Edwards 8 Jun; 1st southbound T Canton 23 Aug.

“Yellow” Palm Warbler: breeding reports 6 sites in & near Adirondacks incl juv T Croghan 16 Aug.

“Western” Palm Warbler: arr FD 31 Aug.

Prairie Warbler: max 33 FD 29 Jun, high.

Wilson’s Warbler: arr FD 24 Aug; max 7 FD 30 Aug.

TOWHEES - WEAVERS

SUMMER TANAGER: f FD 29 Jun (JB).

DICKCISSEL: terr m FD 24 Jun to 21 Jul (JB, mob, ph!).

Clay-colored Sparrow: max 24 FD 5 Jul; 8 reports elsewhere W JEFF, where max 4 CV 14 Jun.

Field Sparrow: max 45 FD 10 Jun.

Vesper Sparrow: max 30 FD 3 Jul; 8 reports elsewhere W JEFF, where max 3 Otter Creek Preserve T Alexandria 22 Jul.

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 22 FD 3 Jul; T Greig LEWI 17 Jun, unusual location; only other reports 1-4 each CB, PRWMA, & T Lyme.

Henslow’s Sparrow: max 13 PRWMA 18 Jul (IM, ET); 7 terr FD thru; 2-3/day T Clayton near CB 14 Jun to 5 Aug (GD, mob); only reports.

Lincoln’s Sparrow: max 30 MM 17 Jun.

Bobolink: flocking up and moving by 3 Jul.

Rusty Blackbird: 2 loc Wanakena area T Fine 9 Jul & 27 Aug (BC), only reports.

Orchard Oriole: singles T Watertown 5 Jun, T Orleans 8 Jun, PtPen 13 Jun, & WISP 26 Jul.

Red Crossbill: 5 reports SE STLA, where underreported; Type 3 T Croghan 16 Aug (MR, MY).

White-winged Crossbill: 2 MM 29 Jul (TB, AS), only report.

Pine Siskin: singles Cranberry Lake 19 Jun & 28 Jul; 2 T Croghan 28 Jul; only reports.

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