

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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Both temperature and precipitation were close to average for most of the Region in June. July and August were very warm, averaging 3-5 degrees above normal for most of the Region, but precipitation was about normal both months. One of the surprises of the season was that, despite roughly average precipitation this season and normal or above normal precipitation for most of the previous six months, many areas away from the Region's largest lakes and rivers were very dry.

Water levels on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River were significantly lower than the record high levels from the spring and summer of 2017, but were still high enough during the early and mid-summer to severely limit shorebird habitat. Lake levels dropped enough by late July to expose a modest amount of shoreline, where generally small numbers of shorebirds were seen including several Regionally rare species. On 26 July Matthew Brown photographed a juvenile **Piping Plover** that was banded at an Oswego County nest earlier in the summer, apparently the only sighting of this endangered species in Jefferson County this year, and one of very few sightings in the county since the successful nesting at Lakeview WMA in 2015. On 28 July a group of visiting birders found a **Willet** at El Dorado, and on 25 August Tony Shrimpton saw a Red Knot and Ruddy Turnstone at the same location. Unfortunately, as has become the norm along the Jefferson County shoreline, shorebirds did not linger at any given site for very long, and most of the rare shorebirds were not seen by anybody who chased them. In fact most visits to El Dorado and other lake sites turned up very few shorebirds and sometimes none at all.

Sites away from the immediate Lake Ontario or St. Lawrence River shorelines were very dry all season. Many ponds and wetlands were lower than anybody could remember seeing in many years, and mudflats and shallow wetlands were uncharacteristically common and widespread. Small numbers of shorebirds were noted at many such sites, and, although it seemed like more shorebirds should have been present in some of these wetlands given the ideal conditions, it is likely that so much habitat was spread out over such a large area

that there was no reason for shorebirds to be concentrated anywhere. One exception was the Stone Mills Pool at Perch River WMA, where vast mudflats attracted large numbers of shorebirds that were unfortunately often too distant from any accessible vantage point for easy identification. Yellowlegs of both species were especially abundant here, but the most unusual species were a Stilt Sandpiper on 28 July, probably the same individual Tom Burke and Gail Benson found at nearby Perch Lake on 26 July, and a Wilson's Phalarope on 31 August.

Colonial water birds continue to exhibit a great deal of change on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. For a few years it seemed like DEC efforts to control Double-crested Cormorant numbers were at least slowing down population increases in the Eastern Lake Ontario basin, but since a court order stopped depredation efforts cormorant numbers have resumed their increase. The Little Galloo colony had more nests than in any year since 2011, and record numbers of cormorant nests were on St. Lawrence River islands. Gull Island, which until recently had been the only island in the eastern end of Lake Ontario with nesting Black-crowned Night-Herons, had no nests for the second consecutive year, and the night-heron rookery seems to have been abandoned. Perhaps some of these night-herons moved to the Murphy Islands colony on the St. Lawrence River, where the 118 nests counted by DEC was about double the number documented the past few years. The 2700 Caspian Tern nests DEC counted on Little Galloo Island was another record, but Common Tern nest counts on the St. Lawrence River were down for the second consecutive year after several good years.

Tent caterpillars were widely reported to be abundant this year so it wasn't too surprising to hear numerous cuckoos of both species in early June, and the season's tally of 23 Yellow-billed Cuckoos was well above normal. As many as 10 Black-billed Cuckoos per day were heard calling on Fort Drum early in June, but soon after that cuckoos seemed to stop vocalizing, and the season's tally seemed low given the number that were conspicuous early in the summer.

Golden-winged Warblers receive a great deal of attention in Region 6, but Blue-winged Warblers continue their inexorable expansion north. The Indian River Lakes region in recent years has seemed like the last hope in northern New York for a healthy Golden-winged Warbler population with minimal Blue-winged Warbler influence, but the five Blue-wings compared to 23 Golden-wings reported from the Indian River Lakes this season is, while not a large sample, a higher ratio of Blue-winged Warblers to Golden-winged Warblers than has been reported from the immediate area in past years. This, combined with a high count of three Blue-winged Warblers that Ben Dixon found in Dekalb on 12 June, none of which showed any visible indication of hybridization in a part of the St. Lawrence Valley where pure-looking Blue-winged Warblers have remained scarce, illustrates the continuing expansion of this species in Region 6. What remains something of a mystery is why Blue-winged Warblers seem to be increasing at such a slower rate north of about

Antwerp compared with lowland areas just a short distance to the south, where they surpassed Golden-winged Warblers in abundance several years ago.

Grassland birds are typically the main draw to birders visiting Region 6 from elsewhere, and many such visitors were rewarded this season. Henslow's Sparrows were reported from three locations, with a maximum of 11 at Perch River WMA, but at least three at Chaumont Barrens were the easiest to see and were observed by many after being initially reported by Greg Dashnau. Short-eared Owls nested in the Region again this year, with one pair at Fort Drum and another at Ashland Flats WMA, the latter seen by many observers. A group of Rochester birders observed another Short-eared Owl near Chaumont Barrens on 8 July, but this was the only report from this frequently birded area all season, so it is unclear whether it represents a third nesting site. The 33 Sedge Wrens reported this season was the highest tally since 2009 and included a maximum count of 23 at Fort Drum on 8 July. Many birders saw at least one Sedge Wren in a Canton field that was mostly mowed about 5 July, but where one male continued for at least a month in a small fragment of the field that was not mowed. Only one Upland Sandpiper was reported away from Fort Drum this season.

As is often the case a couple of birds were noticed in unusual locations, although not as many as last summer. Gerry Smith found two **Fish Crows** in Watertown on 21 July, the only report of this species in several years. Fish Crow was reported as possibly breeding in three Watertown-area blocks during the second Breeding Bird Atlas, but there were no more reports until Gerry's this summer. Perhaps more attention needs to be paid to crows in the Watertown area or elsewhere along the Black River to determine whether there are local breeders. Another species that may be overlooked as a breeder in lowland areas of Region 6 is Philadelphia Vireo, which appears to be mostly restricted to the Adirondacks. A Philadelphia Vireo returned to a Fort Drum territory for the second year, and on 25 July a bird that sounded like this species was heard in another spot on Fort Drum, but unfortunately was singing from an off-limits area and could not be seen to be sure it wasn't a Red-eyed Vireo.

The summer season's species tally was 212, a relatively high total for Region 6 during summer although not as high as last year's record-tying count. Given the increase in attention Region 6 has received from birders in the eBird era, such tallies are probably going to continue in the future, and it seems reasonable to expect even higher tallies in the coming years.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFWMA – Ashland Flats WMA; **CB** – Chaumont Barrens preserve, T Clayton; **CCSP** – Coles Creek SP; **CV** – T Cape Vincent; **ED** – El Dorado Preserve, T Ellisburg; **FiC** – Fish Creek WMA; **FD** – Fort Drum Military Reservation; **FL** – Fisher’s Landing, T Alexandria; **FrC** – French Creek WMA; **IRL** – Indian R Lakes; **JEFF** – Jefferson County; **KPSP** – Kring Point SP; **LBSF** – Lonesome Bay State Forest, T Hammond; **LGI** – Little Galloo I; **LWMA** – Lakeview WMA, T Ellisburg; **MM** – Massawepie Mire, T Piercefield and Colton; **PilPt** – Pillar Pt; **PRWMA** – Perch River WMA; **PtPen** – Point Peninsula; **RMSP** – Robert Moses SP; **RRt** – Remington Recreation Trail, T Canton; **SLR** – St. Lawrence R; **StGW** – St. Lawrence Grassland and Wetland Management District, T Dekalb; **STLA** – St. Lawrence County; **StPt** – Stony Pt, T Henderson; **ULLWMA** – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; **WEP** – Winona Experimental Forest, T Ellisburg; **WHWMA** – Wilson Hill WMA; **WI** – Wellesley I; **WP** – Whalen P, T Louisville.

WATERFOWL - HUMMINGBIRDS

Snow Goose: 2 T Brownville 6 Aug (LE), rare but increasingly regular in summer.

Mute Swan: max 4 WI 4 Aug.

Trumpeter Swan: multiple reports FD, PRWMA, ULLWMA, WHWMA & Hunneyman Road T Redwood; increasing.

Wood Duck: max 150 WHWMA 24 Aug.

Blue-winged Teal: 2 AFWMA 6 Jun; PRWMA 12-28 Jun; T Hammond 15 Jun; 2 T Potsdam 23 Jun; ULLWMA 11 & 27 Jul; only reports before Aug; many reports late Aug, incl max 125 PRWMA 31 Aug.

N. Shoveler: AFWMA 15 Jul (SK), only report before 25 Aug; max 2 FL 27 Aug.

Gadwall: max 6 PRWMA 22 Aug.

Am. Wigeon: singles PRWMA, ULLWMA, & PtPen Jul; max 3 PRWMA 26 Aug.

Am. Black Duck: Jun-Jul max 4 ULLWMA 6 Jul & L Bonaparte 26 Jul; many more reports late Aug; max 18 PRWMA.

N. Pintail: arr PRWMA 18 Aug.

Green-winged Teal: WHWMA 9 Jun; ULLWMA 11 Jul; only reports before 27 July; max 60 WHWMA 25 Aug.

Ring-necked Duck: max 87 ULLWMA date, where nesting common; 2 WHWMA 12 Jul, only report away from ULLWMA before late Jul.

Bufflehead: m ULLWMA thru 19 Jun.

Hooded Merganser: max 13 PRWMA 15 Aug.

Com. Merganser: max 35 ED 31 Aug.

Red-breasted Merganser: 6 WHWMA 12 Aug (BB), only report.

Ruddy Duck: ULLWMA 7 Aug (JB), only report.

Pied-billed Grebe: max 44 ULLWMA 16 Aug.

Red-necked Grebe: ULLWMA 19-20 Jun (JB, EW), rare in summer.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: 23 ind 20 locations, more than usual.

Black-billed Cuckoo: max 10 FD 3 Jun; about 35 reports elsewhere, surprisingly low given a tent caterpillar year, *intro*.

Com. Nighthawk: 2-5/day FD thru; PRWMA 24 Jun, only report away from FD before Aug; migr 18 Aug thru; max 32 FD 27 Aug.

E. Whip-poor-will: max 59 FD night 29-30 Jun.

RAILS - LARIDS

Virginia Rail: max 5 FiC 20 Jun.

Sora: only 6 reports from 5 locations; max 2 AFWMA 25 Jun.

Com. Gallinule: max 13 PRWMA 31 Aug.

Am. Coot: PRWMA 16 Jun & ULLWMA 11 Jul.

Sandhill Crane: 2 WHWMA thru (BD) but nesting not confirmed; likely migrants T Watertown 6 Jun (BM) & WI 31 Aug (CF); FrC WMA 23 Jun (NL).

Black-bellied Plover: 16 rep 19 Aug thru; max 14 ED 25 Aug.

Am. Golden-Plover: FL 27 Aug (CF), only report.

Semipalmated Plover: max 24 WHWMA 6 Aug.

PIPING PLOVER: banded juv from Oswego County nest LWMA 26 Jul (MB, photos!), only report, *intro*.

Killdeer: max 50 PRWMA 15 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: 5-6 territories FD Jun & Jul; T LaFargeville 4 Jul (LE), only other rep before Aug; flight calls T Canton 16 Aug (JB).

Ruddy Turnstone: ED 25 Aug, only report.

Red Knot: ED 25 Aug (AS, ph!), rare R6.

Stilt Sandpiper: Perch L 26 Jul (GB, TB); likely same ind PRWMA 28 Jul (JB); only reports.

Sanderling: 7 rep 26 Jul thru; 1 over ULLWMA marsh 16 Aug; unusual loc; max 9 ED 31 Aug.

Baird's Sandpiper: PRWMA 31 Aug, only report.

White-rumped Sandpiper: PRWMA 26 Aug; WI 27 Aug; only reports.

Pectoral Sandpiper: max 12 PRWMA 15 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: max 17 RMSP 27 Jul.

Short-billed Dowitcher: 4 rep PRWMA 16-26 Jul; max 6 PRWMA 26 Jul; no other reports.

Spotted Sandpiper: max 7 T Watertown 5 Jul.

Solitary Sandpiper: arr Ogdensburg 7 Jul; max 3 T Canton 28 Aug.

Lesser Yellowlegs: 2 arr AFWMA 20 Jun (RB), early; max 90 PRWMA 15 Aug.

WILLET (R6): ED 28 Jul (JA, JC, AM, ph!).

Greater Yellowlegs: arr PilPt 7 Jul; max 35 PRWMA 18 Aug.

Wilson's Phalarope: PRWMA 31 Aug (JB), only report.

Bonaparte's Gull: max 25 Grindstone I 4 Aug.

Ring-billed Gull: no count LGI this year; 1662 nests Murphy Islands.

Herring Gull: max 1156 nests LGI.

Great Black-backed Gull: no nests L Ontario or SLR.

Caspian Tern: 2700 nests LGI 6 Jun (IM), record high.

Black Tern: max 20 AFWMA 2 Jul.

Com. Tern: 1048 nests SLR similar to 2017 but fewer than 2014-2016 (LH).

LOONS - PARROTS

Double-crested Cormorant: max 2769 nests LGI, highest count since 2011 (IM); **3491 nests** New York & Canadian islands SLR, record high; *intro*.

Am. Bittern: max 6 FD 3 Jun.

Least Bittern: 13 rep 9 loc JEFF & STLA; better than most recent years but still underreported.

Great Egret: max 89 PRWMA 15 Aug (JB), apparent record high count JEFF.

Green Heron: max 8 AFWMA 28 Jul.

Black-crowned Night-Heron: 118 nests Murphy Islands, record for loc; none Calf Island for second year after apparent displacement by cormorants.

Turkey Vulture: max 68 CV 1 Jul.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: 11 rep.

Cooper's Hawk: 11 rep.

N. Goshawk: 7 rep 5 loc.

Red-shouldered Hawk: 6 rep 5 loc IRL area; only 4 rep elsewhere.

E. Screech-Owl: FD 2 Jun; 2 juv T Lowville 1 Jul; PRWMA 26 Aug; only reports.

Snowy Owl: 2 T Lyme thru at least 6 Jun, one electrocuted on power line (CW, mob).

Short-eared Owl: pr fledged y Jun AFWMA (mob); another juv on terr FD 29 Jun; unclear whether CB 8 Jul (mob) another terr.

N Saw-whet Owl: T Adams 5 Jun.

Red-headed Woodpecker: max 14 FD 3 Jul; T Antwerp 3 Jun; KPSP 23 Aug, only reports away from FD.

Red-bellied Woodpecker: max 3 T Dekalb 9 Jul, continuing to increase in St. Lawrence Valley.

Merlin: 14 rep throughout.

Peregrine Falcon: sev rep T Watertown 6 Jul thru, breeding likely; Aug reports from FD, L Bonaparte, & PRWMA.

FLYCATCHERS – SNOW BUNTING

Olive-sided Flycatcher: Tug Hill WMA 15 Jun; 5 additional nesting loc SE STLA; migr arr FD 20 Aug, still present same loc 24 Aug; max 4 FD 27 Aug.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: max 4 MM 10 Jun; migr arr Trout L 12 Aug.

Alder Flycatcher: max 24 FD 1 Jun.

Philadelphia Vireo: terr m same location FD as 2017 thru 16 Jul, rare outside Adirondacks; T Colton only other Jun or Jul report; migr arr CV 13 Aug.

FISH CROW (R6): 2 T Watertown 21 Jul (GS), *intro*.

Sedge Wren: 3 singing m T Canton field 10 Jun, dropped to 1 m after most of field mowed around 5 Jul (JB, mob); CB 12 Jun (JS, KS); FrC WMA 16 Jun (NL); mult rep at least 2 loc PRWMA (ST, TT, KH, NL); max 23 FD 8 Jul (JB); 2 Otter Creek Preserve 17 Jul (SB, DD, CJ); StGW 21 Jul (JB).

Carolina Wren: 4 reports.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: max 3 ULLWMA 24 Jun & 30 Aug.

Swainson's Thrush: Brasher SF 13 Jul, rare before Aug outside Adirondacks & Tug Hill; migr arr T Canton 18 Aug.

N. Mockingbird: fewer FD than recent years.

Red Crossbill: about 20 rep throughout R6 thru 16 Jul, mostly of birds heard overhead.

Pine Siskin: max 21 Tooley Pond Road, T Clare & Clifton 10 Jul.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS – CARDINALIDS

Clay-colored Sparrow: max 24 FD 3 Jul.

Vesper Sparrow: max 65 FD 25 Jun.

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 37 FD 3 Jul.

Henslow's Sparrow: 5 m FD June; max 11 m PRWMA June (IM, ET); 3 m CB 5-6 Jul, at least 3 fl 9 Jul (GD, mob).

Lincoln's Sparrow: max 8 MM 21 Jun.

Bobolink: flocking up by 8 Jul, when single flock 110 FD.

Orchard Oriole: T Rutland 12 Jun; T Lowville 1 Jul.

Rusty Blackbird: 2 T Fine 17 Jun.

Louisiana Waterthrush: WEP 12 Jul, only report.

Golden-winged Warbler: 23 IRL area Jun; max 6 FD 6 Jun.

Blue-winged Warbler: 3 T Dekalb 12 Jun high for so far north; 5 IRL area, where modestly increasing, *intro*; max 9 FD 13 & 20 Jun.

"Brewster's" Warbler: 9 FD Jun; 3 St. Lawrence Valley Jun.

"Lawrence's" Warbler: different locations FD 7 & 8 Jul (JB); CB 18 Jun (JS).

Tennessee Warbler: arr FD 20 Aug.

Mourning Warbler: max 12 MM area 10 Jun.

Hooded Warbler: max 7 WEP 12 Jul; WI 1 Jul, north of usual range (DA).

Cape May Warbler: last spring migrant FD 6 Jun, late; fall arr T Hammond 18 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: max 7 Lonesome Bay SF 2 Jun.

N. Parula: last spring migr FD 1 Jun; fall migr arr Murray I 18 Aug.

Magnolia Warbler: obvious migr arr FD 20 Aug.

Bay-breasted Warbler: arr FD 20 Aug.

Blackpoll Warbler: last spring CB 5 Jun; fall arr ED 30 Aug.

"Yellow" Palm Warbler: max 10 MM 8 Jul; additional breeding reports from Horseshoe Bog & Hitchins Pond.

"Western" Palm Warbler: migr arr WHWMA 19 Aug.

Prairie Warbler: max 23 FD 23 Jun.

Wilson's Warbler: 3 arr FD 20 Aug.