

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SPRING 2019

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Winter's icy grip continued into March across most of the state, barely moderating as spring progressed. Early spring was drier than normal and most Regions saw increased precipitation levels by late April and May. Many Regional editors felt that the prolonged cool weather kept early migrants away or in low numbers, but locally, mini warming spells brought bursts of migratory activity.

Upstate, returning waterfowl included a decent showing of geese, common and rare. Greater White-fronted Geese put up good numbers in Regions 1, 2, 3, and 6, where nine were reported at Fort Drum on 14 March. Ross's Geese were reported from seven Regions, and Cackling Geese were reported from nine, with up to 87 individuals reported in Region 2. Pink-footed Goose appeared for the third consecutive year in Region 7, the only report for the state this spring. Snow Geese made strong appearances in Regions 2 and 6. In Region 5, over 75,000 passed Derby Hill on 21 March, following up on 66,000+ the previous day.

A flock of eight Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks appeared in Steuben County, Region 3, on 19 May, followed by a flock in Region 10 that eventually numbered as many as 12 and lingered beyond the end of the period. Eurasian Wigeons were reported from all but two Regions. In Region 9, an early April weather event resulted in a significant grounding of waterfowl and grebes. At Bashakill and Orange Lake, up to 37 Horned and seven Red-necked Grebes and 27 Long-tailed Ducks were tallied along with good numbers of other, less surprising migrants. Long-tails also made waves in Region 4, with multiple reports and a high count of 36.

A King Rail in Region 9 was heard calling at a location where it has appeared in the past. Sandhill Cranes were reported from every Region. Over 100 were tallied at the Braddock Bay hawk watch.

Unusual shorebird species were well represented, with American Golden-Plover in at least three Regions, a surprisingly cooperative Wilson's Plover in Region 10, Black-necked Stilt in three Regions, and Ruffs in Regions 2, 3 and 9. In addition, a Long-billed Dowitcher was noteworthy in Region 5. Also in Region 5, the extremely vulnerable Piping Plover nested again, a hopeful sign for this tiny remnant inland population. A single bird was reported in Region 2. Otherwise, the more regular shorebird species were generally found in decent numbers, with Regions 1 and 2 reporting Ruddy Turnstone counts in the 60s, for example, and good numbers of Dunlin and Semipalmated Sandpipers away from the coast.

Gull numbers were generally mixed, some Regions seeing low to average counts, with a few scattered Little Gulls, a Laughing Gull in Region 5 and an unidentified Franklin's/Laughing in Region 2 being among the highlights. A Least Tern was photographed at Seneca Lake in Region 3, and another at Braddock Bay provided a first spring record for Region 2. Down in Region 10,

Nickerson Beach in Nassau has established itself as a reliable location for Arctic Tern.

Surely one of the most surprising records for the spring season came from Hamlin Beach in late April, when a Magnificent Frigatebird was photographed. This was the first record for Region 2 for this wanderer from the tropics. Is the American White Pelican moving out of the “unexpected” category for New York? It’s now considered regular in Region 1, but was also reported from Regions 2, 5 and 9. Brown Pelicans in Regions 1 and 5, however, are still considered to be another level of rarity. A Pacific Loon was identified from photographs, and later refound, at Saratoga Lake in Region 8, while two were found in Region 10.

American and Least Bitterns received some favorable mentions, both for some good numbers and a few early arrival records. Glossy Ibis was widely reported away from coastal areas, but otherwise, long-legged waders apparently were not well represented, with a few scattered Snowy and Great Egrets mentioned.

Black Vultures continue their increase throughout the state. Both Braddock Bay in Region 2 and Derby Hill in Region 5 reported excellent numbers of Broad-winged Hawks and Bald Eagles, with Derby Hill also mentioning good numbers of Osprey and Golden Eagle but low numbers for Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawk. Rarities included Swainson’s Hawks in Regions 1 and 2, and Mississippi Kites in Regions 2, 4 and 10. Strong numbers were noted for our three normally occurring falcons, and once again Peregrines in Region 5 showed a taste for cuckoos, with 11 brought to one nest through the month of May.

Few Snowy Owls lingered into the spring season, but good numbers of Short-eared and Saw-whet Owls were found, again in Region 2. A Barn Owl recorded in Region 1 was locally rare, but the best bird of this group was undoubtedly the Burrowing Owl found at a Queens (Region 10) construction site and watched by a lucky few in the gloaming. Apparently this bird represented the seventh state record.

Passerine migration was generally given high marks by Regional editors, with a number of interesting early reports, some noteworthy fallouts and more than a few outstanding rarities. A sampling of comments from around the state: “Warblers put on a big show in May as large numbers dazzled birders during the second week of May...” (Region 1); passerines provided “so many interesting observations that only a sampling can be provided here.” (Region 2); “record early arrival dates were tied or set for five species” (Region 6); and “southern passerines such as Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, and Yellow-throated and Prothonotary Warblers were widely encountered across the Region this season” (Region 10).

A quick mention of some interesting species which were not part of the wave of southern arrivals—a Townsend’s Solitaire in Region 8 lingered into early April, Boreal Chickadees were found in Regions 5 and 6, and a Hoary Redpoll lingered into early March in Region 2. By far the standout in this category was the Golden-crowned Sparrow, first identified in December of 2018. My apologies

for overlooking this bird in the winter report, but, determined not to be ignored, the sparrow lingered into spring, demanding its place on these pages!

Summer Tanagers were reported from six Regions, including four from Region 1, with Western Tanager reported from Regions 9 and 10. Among the many other noteworthy records, Prothonotary Warblers were reported from six Regions, a Swainson's Warbler was a one-day wonder at Central Park and 35 Orange-crowned Warblers were reported from Region 2. With its saturation coverage, it's now very difficult for Central Park to add new species to the park list, but in April, White-winged Dove made it onto the cumulative list. A Townsend's Warbler entertained lucky birders at Fairhaven in Region 5, and two days later another turned up at Bashakill in Region 9. Continuing with the "rare birds in multiple Regions" theme, Yellow-headed Blackbirds turned up in Regions 7 and 9, Painted Buntings in Regions 5 and 6, the latter a first Regional record, and Yellow-breasted Chat in Regions 2 and 6. No doubt the most surprising passerine migrant of the season was Sage Thrasher. What isn't so clear is whether the thrasher that spent several days in the gardens at Jamaica Bay (Region 10) was as surprising as the one that turned up two weeks later on Fire Island (also Region 10). These represented the fifth and sixth state records, after an absence of 46 years. Six Regions mentioned Clay-colored Sparrow, including "a whopping ten locations" in Region 1.

After a mixed bag of winter finch sightings last winter, a few interesting reports made it into these pages. Common Redpolls, Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks, which provided most of the "finch" entertainment last winter, lingered in a number of locations, even persisting into May in Region 6. Evening Grosbeak numbers apparently improved in many areas as spring progressed. See the Region 5 report for Gerry Smith's comments regarding historical timing of this species' movements. In Region 8, a late winter incursion of Pine Grosbeaks was noteworthy. Red Crossbills were not a significant part of the winter finch incursion, so it was surprising when a small flock turned up on eastern Long Island. At least one pair built a nest.

The spring of 2019 produced a number of remarkable rarities. In any normal spring season, easy contenders for Bird of the Season would include the Region 4 Golden-crowned Sparrow (which could easily have been BOTS for the Winter Report), Magnificent Frigatebird in Region 2, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks from two Regions, upstate Brown Pelicans, and multiple Townsend's Warblers. This year, though, what could top a seventh state record Burrowing Owl or fifth and sixth state records of Sage Thrasher? In this remarkable spring season, there is an answer to this question. On 5 May, Pat Lindsay visited the rain puddles where last year she found a mega rare Wood Sandpiper. Not one to rest on her laurels, Pat managed to pull a **Common Greenshank** out of a small flock of yellowlegs! This first NYS record, one of very few for North America outside of Alaska, is the clear shoo-in for BOTS for spring 2019. I'm pretty sure that the puddles at Timber Point County Park will be well attended next spring!

Corrigenda: In Highlights of the Season—Winter (*The Kingbird* 69: 131) a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was incorrectly attributed to Region 4; it was actually the “bird of the season” for Region 3.



Common Greenshank, Timber Point Golf Course, *Suffolk*, 5 May 2019, © Tim Dunn.