

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SUMMER 2019

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Summer 2019 started out cooler and wetter than average in most parts of the state, with early June tending to be quite a bit cooler than normal. By July, summer temperatures returned, and the month was generally warmer and drier than average. August was right around average, both in temperature and in rainfall, except for Region 2, where less than half the normal amount of precipitation fell. The remnants of Hurricane Barry brought some tropical heat in late July, but apparently not much in the way of tropical birds were left after its long meandering from its Gulf landfall.

New York certainly seems to be on the radar for a number of species that were great rarities just a short time ago. As we've seen Sandhill Crane, Clay-colored Sparrow, Summer Tanager and others become relatively normal, if still local, fixtures in many Regions, it seems to be a matter of time before birds like Trumpeter Swan, American White Pelican, Black-necked Stilt and maybe even Black-bellied Whistling Duck become familiar to more and more of us. As part of a larger incursion into the northeast, single Black-bellied Whistling Ducks were found in Regions 1, 3, 6 and 8 from the beginning of the period through mid June, and up to 12 continued from spring around Jones Inlet in Region 10, through early July.

Trumpeter Swans were reported from four Regions, with breeding confirmed in three of those. Nesting was confirmed at Three Rivers NWR in Region 5 and there were several other likely but unconfirmed attempts in that Region alone.

Waterfowl were given positive mentions in Region 3, with good numbers of Wood Duck, Blue-winged Teal and Northern Shoveler among others. In Region 5, Blue-winged Teal and Ruddy Ducks, both with chicks, provided confirmation of breeding, while Common Goldeneye was noted as an intriguing possibility there and in Region 6.

Species lingering into summer included Tundra Swan, both scaup, Black Scoter and Long-tailed Duck in Region 3, White-winged Scoter and Long-tailed Duck in Region 2 and a Canvasback in Region 1. As many as 183 Common Eider at Shinnecock in Region 10 illustrate this species' increasing occurrence in summer in recent years. While we're scanning the waterways, other surprising summer sightings included Red-necked Grebes in Regions 2, 3 and 7, Horned Grebe in Region 1, Red-throated and Common Loons lingering in Regions 2 and 3, and a Red-throated photographed in breeding plumage on 20 July at Peck Lake in Region 8. A late Glaucous Gull was found at Woodlawn Beach in Region 1, and what apparently was the same "Thayer's" Iceland Gull was found in Regions 1 and 2 on 14 June.

Laughing Gulls were noted in Region 9 as far north as Croton Point along the Hudson River, while singles turned up in Regions 1, 2 and 3. The recently discovered Laughing Gull colony in Great South Bay, amazingly just the second significant breeding site in Region 10 and New York State, continued again this summer. There were numerous reports of immature Lesser Black-backed Gull throughout the season along the south shore of Long Island; it is still a mystery where these birds go to breed when they mature. Multiple Little Gulls were reported from Region 7, and what apparently was an unusual second-winter plumage bird was photographed at Braddock Bay in August. It appears that both Black and Caspian Terns are maintaining strongholds in several upstate Regions, but high water at Little Galloo Island apparently contributed to that Caspian Tern colony's 50% plus reduction. See also the Region 6 report on unusual nest site selection for the only successful Common Tern nest in the

Region. In Region 10, a Bridled Tern summered at Great Gull Island for the fourth straight year and another was found offshore; Arctic Terns were found at Nickerson Beach, Democrat Point and the Line Islands; and there were three Sandwich Tern reports. A Common Tern thought to be of the Siberian-breeding subspecies *longipennis* was photographed at Nickerson Beach as well. Region 10 also had its share of pelagic highlights, but seawatching from land was rather poor this season. High counts of Double-crested Cormorants and Black-crowned Night Herons were reported from traditional sites in Region 6.

As mentioned up top, American White Pelicans appear to be gaining a real foothold in the state. See Mike Morgante's comments in Region 1 regarding the potential for this species to breed in the area. Elsewhere, singles were noted in Regions 2, 3 and 5. A Brown Booby was photographed as it perched on the mast of a sailing ship on the Hudson River in Region 9. This provides the first record for Orange County and the first for the Region. Region 10 had multiple reports of Brown Booby along the south shore of Long Island. It was a good year for Brown Pelican on Long Island as well.

Common Gallinules and American Coots were literally on display at the Sandhill Crane Unit of the Northern Montezuma WMA as reduced vegetation revealed peak counts of 105 and 180 respectively. Gallinules were noteworthy breeders in Regions 4 and 5, and there were two reports from Region 10, where they are scarce at best. Black-necked Stilts were found at Montezuma NWR in Region 3 and again in Region 1, where the possibility of eventual breeding was considered. Sandhill Cranes continue to expand in waves throughout the state, with birds reported from every Region. Breeding is now looked upon as routine in many locations.

Several American Avocets were found in the westernmost Regions of the state, and 2-3 delighted birders from the Shinnecock area to Mecox Bay in Region 10. Piping Plovers fledged young again in at Sandy Island Beach SP in Region 5, obviously a remarkable accomplishment for this dwindling population and for all the human caretakers involved. Upland Sandpipers continue to hang on, with reports from almost every Region, albeit all involving small numbers and confirmed breeding at just a few sites. Good counts of American Golden Plover were recorded in Regions 3 and 5. Counts of Whimbrel included 25 and 38 in Region 2—good numbers for anywhere in the state. Other good shorebird records included Red Knot and Sanderling at several upstate locations, Marbled Godwit in Region 2, and Western Sandpiper in Regions 2 and 8. Triple digit counts of Semipalmated Sandpiper were reported from Regions 1 and 2, topped by 1300 at MNWR in Region 3.

Hérons and egrets were reported in substantially higher than normal numbers in several upstate Regions, with 103 Great Egret in Region 9 setting a new record, while Regions 3 and 4 reported 207 and 28 respectively. Also in Region 9, 98 Great Blue Herons and seven scattered Little Blue Herons were noteworthy. Single Snowy Egrets and Glossy Ibis in Region 3 were topped by

a first Regional record of White Ibis, found in late August at MNWR. After an exceptional showing in spring, just a single White-faced Ibis was reported in Region 10, over two days in mid June at Captree Island marsh.

An unsuccessful nesting was attempted by a pair of Yellow-crowned Night Herons in Region 9. See the article pages 314-316 in this issue for more detail.

Black Vultures continue to expand north and west. Breeding is probably occurring, but will be difficult to document in this species. A Swallow-tailed Kite in Region 2 provided a fifth Regional record, while a Mississippi Kite was seen soaring over Ward Pound Ridge in Region 9 in June. There were two Mississippi Kite sightings in Region 10, one on Staten Island and one in eastern Suffolk County. Continuing recent trends, Osprey and Bald Eagle numbers were generally good and there were encouraging signs for all three falcons, at least in the western Regions. Most other raptors seem to be not doing so well.

Woodpeckers seem to be doing well in several areas, with Red-headed in particular receiving positive mentions in Regions 1, 2 and 3, and a pair seen at a nest hole in Robert Cushman Murphy Park in Region 10, where breeding is infrequent. Black-backed Woodpeckers were found in Regions 5 and 7 this season, with breeding confirmed in the latter. In a tale of north meets south, Red-bellied Woodpecker also bred in Region 7, apparently not for the first time.

Acadian Flycatchers seem to be increasing in Region 1 and good numbers were reported for Region 2. Olive-sided Flycatchers were also reported in good numbers, both as spring migrants in early June and as returning fall birds at the end of the period. Likewise, Yellow-bellied and Least Flycatcher and Eastern Kingbird received positive comments from various Regional editors. Very notable was an early Western Kingbird at Croton Point in Region 9 in mid August, but the best of the lot was single-observer sighting of a Gray Kingbird, photographed at Smith Point County Park in Region 10. Both these birds are featured on the covers of this issue. Canada Jays were confirmed as breeding in Region 7, but went unreported elsewhere. In Region 1, Fish Crows were present, but no breeding was confirmed. Sedge Wrens are being detected over a wide area, albeit in small numbers. Reports came in from at least six Regions. Boreal Chickadee seems to be increasingly difficult to find, with apparently one report each for Regions 6 and 7.

Four Regions reported Evening Grosbeaks—a shadow of last winter's mini irruption. Red Crossbills showed up in six Regions, nested at two locations in Region 6, and at least attempted nesting on Long Island, continuing from spring. Both crossbills put in appearances in Region 7. Clay-colored Sparrows continue to colonize the state, with birds showing up in six Regions, often at multiple locations. Check the article in this issue and the Region 5 report for some sparrow drama which played out in a Syracuse cemetery! A Nelson's Sparrow at Times Beach in Region 1 provided a rare spring record for the Region. A White-crowned Sparrow in Wayne County in Region 2 on 1 August was quite early, while two in Region 1 in early June must have been late northbound birds.

See the Region 10 report for unusual dates for White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco. A Dickcissel lingered at Montezuma NWR in Region 3 through late August.

Things continue to look bleak for Golden-winged Warbler, with reports ranging from few to none. Region 3 reported good numbers of migrant warblers, notably Cape May, Blackburnian, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Pine and Blackpoll. Elsewhere reports were mixed. Some of the southern breeders continue to do well, with Prothonotary reported from five Regions, including several breeding pairs, and Hooded, noted in three Regions and generally on the increase. A Yellow-throated Warbler was photographed at Letchworth SP in Region 2 in late June. A Connecticut Warbler was identified by song recordings at Southard's Pond Park in southwestern Suffolk County on 1 June, a very rare spring occurrence in Region 10, and one at 4 Mile Creek in Region 2 on 22 August set a record early southbound date. Mourning Warbler seemed to be well represented state-wide. A pair with chicks at Neversink, in Region 9, provided the first breeding record for Sullivan County.

Overall, the season produced quite a few interesting reports, and as always, some disappointing and even alarming trends are noted. Not surprisingly for a summer report, it was a little light on true rarities. The immature Brown Booby that hitched a ride on the sailboat mast must have been a shocker, but I think that as an overall head-scratcher, I'd have to go with the LeConte's Sparrow found near Willsboro in Region 7 on 12 August. Not only is this a rare bird in general for New York, but this individual was a juvenile present in mid August. I don't think many birders had this species on the potential breeding list for New York, but this record at least points toward that possibility. Regional Editor Bill Krueger mentions that there are no summer records in eBird south of Canada on the east coast.

Thank you all for reading along and here's to some great birding ahead.