

REGION 10—MARINE

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Weather this season was relatively constant. The end of the winter was well above normal, +4° to 5° F, and those temperatures changed little through April. May lacked its regular summer component and temperatures stayed below average. Precipitation was below or near average, driest in May. There was only trace

snowfall during this period (and back through February), including 23 April, a remarkably late event.

	Central Park			Islip		
Temp	Mean	Normal	Deviation	Mean	Normal	Deviation
Mar	48.0°	42.5°	+5.5°	44.8°	39.3°	+4.5°
Apr	50.3°	53.0°	+2.7°	47.1°	49.1°	-2.0°
May	60.3°	62.4°	-2.1°	57.7°	58.6°	-0.9°

	Central Park			Islip		
Precip	Total	Normal	Deviation	Total	Normal	Deviation
Mar	3.78"	4.36"	-0.58"	4.20"	4.44"	-0.24"
Apr	4.49"	4.50"	-0.01"	4.57"	4.34"	+0.23"
May	1.65"	4.19"	-2.54"	1.22"	3.78"	-2.56"

A seasonal birding report is usually about birds, but the highs and lows of Spring migration were overshadowed by a human issue. On 1 March, the beginning of this writeup period, the first New Yorker was diagnosed with the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, and the ensuing illness called COVID-19. This illness had been first recorded in December 2019, and had proven to be a rare mix of contagious and severe in major outbreaks in Asia and Europe in January and February. A week into March there were 100 cases in Region 10. Two patients succumbed on 14 March. At this time, the severity was apparent to many, and the St. Patrick's Day parade was postponed indefinitely for the first time in its 259 year run. A few days later there were 1,000 cases. A week after the first deaths there were 10,000 cases. At the end of March there were over 80,000 cases in the state and 1,000 deaths. The public was implored to stay home to fight the spread. Food and cleaning product shortages made necessary grocery runs especially nerve-racking during March. Midway through April, face coverings were (finally) strongly encouraged for necessary public forays. By the end of the month, 300,000 New Yorkers had been diagnosed, and over 18,000 had died. Thankfully New Yorkers had succeeded in "flattening the curve" at this time and cases tapered through the end of the period, even as civil unrest and pleasant weather brought a dichotomy of people back into shared spaces. Unfortunately, the hardship that the Northeast experienced did not prevent other states from later experiencing even greater damage from this illness.

Birding became a welcomed safe activity, but not immediately. A number of species observed in the beginning of the year were not recorded in this period because March coincided with the beginning of voluntary isolation for many. Some species not recorded include Ross's, Greater White-fronted, and Barnacle Goose, Tundra Swan, Eurasian Wigeon, and Barrow's Goldeneye, which had all been seen in the weeks leading up to the first wave. The volume of observations was suppressed by many people erring on the side of staying home for a majority of this period. New York began a gradual reopening process in May, and cases

remained low, inspiring confidence to physically isolated activities such as birding. It is therefore hard to determine the cause of both Black and Royal Tern being unrecorded this period.

While spontaneous birding was up to the individual's discretion, organizers of special birding events repeatedly made the judicious decision not to gamble with a novel disease. For that reason, a number of dedicated surveys did not produce all their expected data this season. No charter pelagics were run, and groups that host bird walks forewent them.

A few overwintering rarities continued into this period, including a **Harlequin Duck** in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, a **Thick-billed Murre** at Montauk Point (after a strong midwinter flight of this species), a **Townsend's Solitaire** on the South Fork, and a **Varied Thrush** in Prospect Park. After a winter with many **Painted Bunting** records, at least one individual persisted into this period in Brooklyn, appearing at Plumb Beach 19 March, and then presumably the same bird was at the nearby Salt Marsh Nature Center a few weeks later.

April brought a few unexpected species, including a **Cave Swallow** at Robert Moses on 14 April. This species had been a celebrated late fall migrant, but now seems ambivalent about which seasonal migration brings it east. There were a few other records in the Northeast this Spring. A **Sandhill Crane** was spotted over the north end of Central Park on 29 April, a great record for New York County. After incredible performances the preceding two years, Timber Point failed to produce any East Coast mega shorebirds. However, the annual roaming **White-faced Ibises** there were joined by at least two **Black-headed Gulls** in the last week of April: an immature at Timber Point itself and an adult at a nearby pond a week later. The last day of April brought a **Black-legged Kittiwake** inshore enough to be seen from Robert Moses.

The expected seabirds were seen during dedicated seawatches, especially in Suffolk County. One private offshore trip to the underwater topological feature along the continental shelf edge called The Claw produced a few surprising species on 27 May; both **Dovekie** and **Atlantic Puffin** were recorded. Back on land, May was sandwiched between two boobies. A **Brown Booby** discovered resting in the median of the Ocean Parkway near Gilgo Beach spent the night, and a single adult was noted from a seawatch at Robert Moses on the 28th. This species has been noted more frequently in our area in the last few years, with 2019 being a record-breaking flight year. A **Pomarine Jaeger** spent most of 30 May resting on Nickerson Beach before flying off on its own.

Peak neotropical passerine migration was again paltry on average. Despite this, the first two weeks of May hosted an unusual showing of **Cerulean Warbler**. Although this species is always recorded in the Region during migration, it had never been eBirded from all seven R10 counties in the same Spring. Not only that, but every county had at least two records except Kings, which had one, at Greenwood Cemetery. A few individuals lingered, most notably a female at the Henry Ingraham Preserve in Northport, Suffolk, for six days straight. Bizarrely, this species was not reported from either Central or Prospect Parks, which are the

expected places to encounter them. Light southwesterly wind and some light rain brought a refreshing spectacle of migrants to our Region on 16 May. The relative abundance of Cerulean Warblers gave way to an actual abundance of Bay-breasted Warblers. Ryan Zucker encountered **22** on a walk through Central Park that day, and double digits were noted across the Region, particularly in Queens and Kings. In terms of high counts, Ryan's single-checklist total for Bay-breasted Warbler was higher than all but seven other parulids this period, beating Black-throated Green, Pine, Blackpoll, Blackburnian, and Chestnut-sided.

No species officially beat their earliest arrival dates, but a number tied, including Semipalmated Plover, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, House Wren, and Nashville, Yellow, and Black-throated Blue Warblers. A few species, like Eastern Bluebird, appeared to arrive late, but with their average arrival of 11 March, lockdown bias and error was likely. Despite human caution, many species were recorded right around or just before their average arrival date over the last few decades.

Other individual highlights to round out May were a well-documented **Bicknell's Thrush** in Prospect Park on the 16th, the first documented **May Dickcissels** for Brooklyn on the 16th, **19 Grasshopper Sparrows** on territory at Fresh Kills Park, a **Swainson's Warbler** at the Muttontown Preserve on the 26th, a **Nelson's Sparrow** in a smaller north Queens marsh on the 27th, **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** at Breezy Point and Fire Island, and a **Mississippi Kite** on the 31st over Central Park.

293 species were reported in the Region this Spring, five fewer than last Spring.

The editors are saddened to report the loss of Shelley Vakay, beloved friend, mentor, and long-time member of the Eastern Long Island Audubon Society (ELIAS), formerly Moriches Bay Audubon, who passed away in May at the age of 86. A heartfelt tribute to her, written by Bob Adamo, Sue Benson, MaryLaura Lamont, and Gigi Spates, published in the Fall issue of the ELIAS newsletter, *The Osprey*, expresses the grace, compassion, selflessness, and skill of this special woman, who tirelessly volunteered for many positions and projects within and outside of the Audubon chapter. She participated in many bird walks and Christmas Bird Counts, supported the Quogue Wildlife Sanctuary, and was a member of the board of the Southampton Town Conservation Committee. NYSOA will remember her for partnering with the famous Gil Raynor and other members of their small club to take on the huge task of hosting hundreds of statewide birders at the then Federation of New York Bird Clubs' Annual Meeting in 1982—with the legendary Dennis Puleston as banquet speaker—the last time the meeting was hosted in Suffolk County.

The tribute in its entirety will be posted shortly on the ELIAS website at <http://www.easternlongislandaudubonsociety.org/index.html>

Shelley will be truly missed.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

APEC – Alley Pd Environmental Center, QUEE; **APP** – Alley Pd P, QUEE; **BPT** – Breezy Pt, QUEE; **CCP** – Cupsogue CP, SUFF; **CIC** – Coney I Cr/P, KING; **CP** – Central P, NEWY; **CR** – Cemetery of the Resurrection, RICH; **EPCAL** – Calverton Grasslands (former Grumman Property), Calverton, SUFF; **FBF** – Floyd Bennett Field, KING; **FKP** – Fresh Kills P, RICH; **FP** – Forest P, QUEE; **GKP** – Great Kills P, RICH; **HLSP** – Hempstead L SP, NASS; **JBWE** – Jones B SP, NASS; **JBWR** – Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, QUEE; **KP** – Kissena P, QUEE; **MB** – Mecox Bay/Mecox Inlet, SUFF; **MF** – Miller Field, RICH; **MP** – Montauk Pt SP, SUFF; **OP** – Orient Pt CP, SUFF; **PBP** – Pelham Bay P, BRON; **PP** – Prospect P, KING; **RBA** – NY Rare Bird Alert, **RMSP** – Robert Moses SP, SUFF; **Shinn** – Shinnecock Inlet, SUFF; **SPCP** – Smith Pt CP/Old Inlet, SUFF; **SMNC** – Salt Marsh Nature Center at MPB (KING); **SMSP** – Sunken Meadow SP, SUFF; **TP** – Timber Pt Golf Course, Great River, SUFF; **VCP** – Van Cortlandt P, BRON; **VSSP** – Valley Stream SP, NASS.

WATERFOWL – HUMMINGBIRDS

Snow Goose: max 600, JBWR, 11 Mar (SSM); 500 FBF, 7 Mar (mob).

Cackling Goose: VCP, 1-2 Mar (G. Chapin); Brookfield P RICH, 1-2 Mar (ACi, N. Shamban); Arthur Hendrickson P NASS, thru 7 Mar (mob); Maratooka L SUFF 16 Mar (JSe)

King Eider: late, OP, thru 10 May (A. Vinson), f present all winter.

Common Eider: max 809 Culloden Pt SUFF, 8 Mar (AnW).

Harlequin Duck: decent totals: max 6 Pt Lookout NASS, thru 6 Apr (mob); Shinn, 15 Mar (J. Bohrer); 5 OP, thru 24 Apr (mob); imm m Sheepshead Bay, thru 26 Apr (mob), unusual location; 2 SPCP, thru 15 May (KCa).

Common Goldeneye: max 32 OP, 6 Mar (AV); low.

Northern Bobwhite: reintroduced birds reported from central SUFF and South Fork SUFF.

Ring-necked Pheasant: only reported from around greater Jamaica Bay, QUEE and KING, and eastern SUFF. Max 4, SMNC, 17 Apr (R. Payne).

Wild Turkey: 1 Throgs Neck BRON, 22 Apr (M. Zadrozny), unusual location.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: Brookhaven SUFF, 31 May (MSch), early; Ridge SUFF, 6 Apr (BY), early; CP, 18 Apr (ELeo).

Chuck-will's-widow: max 3, Fire I SUFF, 27 May (C. Kessler), Owls Head P KING, 3 May

(SBl), only individual recorded in NYC this season.

Eastern Whip-poor-will: max 11, Napeague, 5 May (AnW)

RAILS – TROPICBIRDS

Virginia Rail: max 6, PBP, 31 May (PHo).

Sora: only 2 records: Oakwood Bch RICH, 23 Apr (M. Shikhman, ACi); MP, 22 May thru end of period (TS).

Sandhill Crane: CP, 29 Apr (TPe, mob), flyover, unusual location.

American Golden-Plover: only two: RMSP, 14 Apr (AP); CCP, 4 May (AP).

Semipalmated Plover: arr 16 Mar, Fire I SUFF (PA), early.

Marbled Godwit: CCP, 29 May (JRa).

Stilt Sandpiper: 1, Captree I SUFF, 17-24 Apr (mob).

Western Sandpiper (Spring): NB, 20 Mar (mob), surely overwintering.

POMARINE JAEGER (R10): NB, 30 May (R. Longiaru, mob).

Dovekie: MP, 1 Mar (StB); offshore at 39.8718037, -71.7297363 SUFF, 27 May (JSh, AnW), late.

THICK-BILLED MURRE: MP, thru 3 Mar (mob).

Razorbill: Canarsie Pier KING, thru 2 Mar (mob), unusual location; dep CCP, 31 Mar (StB).

ATLANTIC PUFFIN: offshore at 39.8718037,-71.7297363 SUFF, 27 May (JSh, AnW), late.

Black-legged Kittiwake: dep RMSP, 30 Apr (TS).

Black-headed Gull: imm Sheepshead Bay, thru 4 Mar (mob); imm TP, 24-26 Apr (PJL, mob); ad Brookwood Hall P SUFF, 30 Apr (J. Stocker, PA)

Lesser Black-backed Gull: max 337, Fire I SUFF, 17 May (anon).

Gull-billed Tern: RMSP, 18 May (AP), unusual in SUFF.

Black Tern: no reports this period.

ARCTIC TERN (R10): MB, 19, 24 May (ACo, J. Mittermeier); CCP, 20 May (AP); RMSP, 24 May (SSM, PJL).

Royal Tern: no reports this period.

Black Skimmer: Garden City NASS, 31 May (BF), extremely unusual away from preferred habitat.

LOONS – PARAKEET

PACIFIC LOON: Culloden Pt SUFF, 1 Mar (RBA).

BROWN BOOBY: Gilgo SP SUFF, 1 May (mob), sleeping in median; RMSP, 28 May (J. Klein, AP).

Northern Gannet: max 25,000 GKP, 4 Apr (RVE); 17,000 Arden Bch and 8500 Wolfes Pd P RICH 5 Apr (ACi); 4000 Peconic Bay, S Jamesport 4 Apr (MLL), very rare so far west in the bay; 3000 well inside Fire I Inlet 9 Apr (TD), where rarely seen.

Brown Pelican: increasing in R10: RMSP, 18 Apr (ChC); OP, 14 May (JSe, KJ Klein).

American Bittern: dep Ludlow Creek SUFF, 14 May (MMB).

Least Bittern: SMNC, 15 May (SBI); PP, 20-21 May (mob); JBWR, 21 May (CFi); TP, 29 May (TD).

Tricolored Heron: Little Neck Bay, QUEE, 22 Apr (SWa, IR), unusual on N Shore.

Cattle Egret: Cutchogue SUFF, 22 Apr – 2 May (mob); RMSP, 16 May (PMo, AP); MF, 19 May (ACi).

WHITE-FACED IBIS: 2 TP, 15 Apr -14 May (mob); Suffolk Co Env Ctr SUFF, 18 Apr (LN); Captree I SUFF, 28 Apr – 9 May (mob).

Black Vulture: incr, obs in all boroughs and entire N Shore of Suffolk.

MISSISSIPPI KITE: CP, 31 May (mob).

Red-shouldered Hawk: max 5, L Panomoka SUFF, 29 May thru end of period (mob), nest.

Rough-legged Hawk: Ocean Pkwy NASS and SUFF, thru 21 Mar (mob), likely multiple birds.

Barn Owl: JBWR, thru period (mob), multiple nests.

Snowy Owl: not a major flight year: NB, 1 Mar (mob); Shinn, 14 Mar (M. Jensen); SPCP, 18 Mar (KCa)

Short-eared Owl: GKP, 11 Mar (J. Gyekis), migrating high midday.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: not a major flight year: Birch Creek Owl Pd CP SUFF, 1 Mar (BBo, TS); Red Cote Pr NASS (SPe); CR, 29 Mar (ACi).

Pileated Woodpecker: simultaneous pair of obs in Queens, where unusual: APP, 8 May (L. Weir); FP, 8 May (mob).

FLYCATCHERS – SNOW BUNTING

Cliff Swallow: max 14, APEC, 30 May (BF), colony.

CAVE SWALLOW: RMSP, 14 Apr (MMB).

Sedge Wren: KP, 11 May (EMi, mob).

TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE: Three Mile Harbor SUFF, thru 24 Mar (mob).

BICKNELL'S THRUSH (R10): PP, 16 May (S. Taylor).

VARIED THRUSH: PP, thru 7 Apr (RBA).

Lapland Longspur: Brookfield P RICH, 1 Mar (ACi); 2 NB, thru 7 Mar (mob).

Snow Bunting: max 30 NB, 1 Mar (K. Drake), low.

NEW WORLD SPARROWS – CARDINALIDS

Chipping Sparrow: max 250 CP, 20 Apr (Sch), incl group of 200.

Clay-colored Sparrow: CP, 3 May (mob).

Lark Sparrow: Red Hook KING, 15 May (R. Fleming).

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 19, FKP, 26 May (JRG), known breeding site.

Seaside Sparrow: CICP, 8 May (DG), unusual location.

Nelson's Sparrow: Udall's Cove QUEE, 27 May (EMi); 2 PB, 27-29 May (mob); SMNC, 28 May (HL).

Lincoln's Sparrow: max 10 SMNC, 15 May (SBI).

Yellow-breasted Chat: many in NYC, Muttontown Pres NASS, 30 May thru end of period (mob).

Yellow-headed Blackbird: m, BPT, 15 May (R. Ellard); Fire I SUFF, 29 May (E. Tyrer).

Rusty Blackbird: max 60, Cunningham P QUEE, 12 Mar (SWa).

Boat-tailed Grackle: max 310, JBWR, 20 Mar (MMB).

Golden-winged Warbler: Riverside P NEWY, 6-7 May (mob); CP, 15-17 May (mob).

SWAINSON'S WARBLER: Muttontown Pres NASS, 26 May (L. Swenson).

Kentucky Warbler: reports from all counties except NASS.

Cerulean Warbler: oddly not detected in CP or PP, but many records incl: United Nations NEWY, 2 May (AF); IHP, 5 May (NOR, NSo); JBWR, 7 May (CFi, BF); VSSP, 7-9 May (mob); Henry Ingraham Pres, 7-12 May (mob), remarkable duration; Hillview Res, 11 May (SCa); W Sayville residence, 13 May (MGr); VCP 13 May (A. Rice, G. McGee); HLSP, 14 May (AG, JGa); *intro*.

Northern Parula: max 117 APP, 11 May (SPe).

Bay-breasted Warbler: strong showing with double digits at multiple sites, mostly in QUEE and KING: max 22, CP, 16 May (RZ); *intro*.

Yellow-throated Warbler: records from every R10 county.

Wilson's Warbler: max 15, Willowbrook P, RICH (RVe, L. Manne).

Summer Tanager: records from every R10 county.

Scarlet Tanager: max 52, IHP, 12 May (NOR).

Blue Grosbeak: records from every R10 county: 2 EPCAL, 28 May (GB), f nest building.

PAINTED BUNTING: PB, 19 Mar (SBI, HL, TPr); SMNC, 7 Apr (HL), possibly same individual; *intro*.

Dickcissel: 2 CICP, 16 May (DG), flyovers, first Spring record in eBird for KING.



Fish Crow and Northern Mockingbird, Bay Shore, *Suffolk*, 24 Apr 2020, © Brendan Fogarty.