

REGION 6—ST. LAWRENCE

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A period of warm, dry weather that began in May predominated through the summer, with above normal temperatures all three months, and below normal precipitation during June and July. Watertown's mean temperature for June was 65.6° F, which was 2.1° above normal. July was much warmer, with a mean temperature of 74.4°, or 5.8° above average. August had a lower departure from normal but was still 1.5° above average. The 2.8" of precipitation that fell during June and July combined was 2.7" below normal, but the dry spell broke in August, when 2.5" of rain fell between 2 and 5 August, and the last month of the season saw 4.8" of rain.

The dry late spring and early summer weather resulted in low water at most of the Region's ponds, lakes, and streams, but Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River remained high. Efforts to reduce high water on the Great Lakes from excessive precipitation in recent years resulted in water levels that were somewhat lower than in 2017 and 2019, but still well above average. Unlike at Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River, where exposed shoreline was hard to find, mudflats lined most of the Region's streams and ponds, and many typically damp places were completely dry.

This summer marked the first breeding season in New York State's third Breeding Bird Atlas, and a few noteworthy waterfowl breeding records were documented in Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties. Trumpeter Swans continue to increase in Region 6, with multiple nests at Perch River and Upper and Lower Lakes WMAs, and additional nests in several other locations. At Upper and Lower Lakes WMA groups of up to 22 adults were seen in addition to at least four pairs that fledged young, making for the highest summer Regional Trumpeter Swan count yet. A group of six fully grown American Wigeon at Upper and Lower Lakes was thought to be a brood, and Blue-winged Teal broods were seen at Fort Drum and three Wildlife Management Areas. A female Ring-necked Duck with two young chicks at Fort Drum on 7 July appears to be the only nesting record from Jefferson County since the 1950s, when this species apparently nested at Perch Lake. This was the only confirmed nesting of Ring-necked Duck in Region 6 away from Upper and Lower Lakes, where an estimated 15-20 broods were observed throughout the summer. Bill Munro saw a female Common Goldeneye with two tiny chicks near Picton Island on the St. Lawrence River, and noted that goldeneye have nested annually at this site for many years, although nesting anywhere in Region 6 has rarely been documented.

American White Pelicans are occasionally spotted in Region 6 but typically don't linger, so many birders appreciated a cooperative individual at Wilson Hill WMA 1-6 June. The season that started with a white pelican ended

with a **Brown Pelican**, first seen around 28 or 29 August by a non-birder boating on the St. Lawrence River near Chippewa Bay, who told Glenn Seeholzer about it allowing Glenn to find it on 31 August. While spending most of its time on American islands or shoals, the Brown Pelican generally required the use of a boat to see, although a few Canadians had distant glimpses from the north side of the river. Also rare in the region were **Black Vultures** seen over Potsdam on 12 June by Sarah Sirsat and over Carthage on 18 June by Mike Pierce. American and Least Bitterns were well documented on the Breeding Bird Atlas this year, with confirmed nesting in four blocks for each species, compared to nine blocks for American Bittern and no blocks for Least Bittern in Region 6 for all of Atlas 2000.

Given the modest expectations typical of Region 6, shorebird numbers and diversity were reasonably good. High water along Lake Ontario did not leave much room for shorebirds, but there was enough to allow a few Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstones, and other species to stop by. Some of the best conditions were at Perch River WMA, where the mostly dry Stone Mills Pool and Lower Pool attracted good numbers of Semipalmated Plovers and Least Sandpipers with a smattering of other species, including multiple Baird's Sandpipers. The East Pool at Wilson Hill WMA, which was mostly drained for vegetation management, was also very good until early August when NYSDEC began refilling the pool, with an adult White-rumped Sandpiper and multiple *hendersoni* Short-billed Dowitchers being the highlights. The Whetstone Gulf Reservoir, also low because of dry weather, attracted a Stilt Sandpiper among other species, allowing some Lewis County birders a chance to pad their county shorebird lists. The best shorebird of the season was an adult **Hudsonian Godwit** foraging on the Richard's Point shoals in the St. Lawrence River for a week in August, allowing a number of people to see this Regional rarity.

NYSDEC conducted statewide Black Tern surveys in 2020, something that happens every 3-4 years. Black Terns were found in five locations in Region 6, with 60-65 each at Perch River and Upper and Lower Lakes WMAs. Overall, Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties accounted for 58% of all of the Black Terns documented in the state, but because of COVID-related personnel limitations fewer sites were surveyed than usual. NYSDEC also counts colonial waterbirds at Little Galloo Island annually, documenting 2280 Caspian Tern this year, 33% more than in 2019 but about average for the past few years. The Herring Gull colony at Little Galloo Island continues to grow, with a record high 1247 nests counted in June. The number of Common Tern nests on Lake St. Lawrence was at a five-year low, but high productivity this summer will hopefully help reverse the recent declining trend.

Eastern Whip-poor-will nesting was confirmed about a dozen times this summer, unfortunately every one of those confirmations was of the same nest located at the edge of a trail at Chaumont Barrens Preserve. This preserve was one of several sites that attracted many birders to Region 6, in this case primarily to see Henslow's Sparrows nesting in an area most birders did not seem to realize was closed to the public. Four Henslow's Sparrows in the Chaumont field, and

another six at Perch River WMA were all that were found this summer, as this species continues to decline in Jefferson County. Upland Sandpipers were similarly scarce, although the approximately 12 territories from five locations was marginally higher than in most recent years. Sedge Wren numbers were low as well, with 8-10 territories at six locations, but given the dry summer it would have been surprising if many more were present.

Several species of irruptive finch were present this summer, primarily in the Adirondacks and mostly in small numbers. Red Crossbill accounted for the bulk of these reports, with several transients seen on Fort Drum and elsewhere in addition to likely breeders in the mountains, although nesting was not confirmed in Region 6. The season's two White-winged Crossbill reports were likely of transient birds as well, as suggested by the single report from Massawepie Mire where dozens of birders submitted eBird checklists. Evening Grosbeak and Pine Siskin were represented by just one and two reports, respectively.

The top rarity of the season was a **Western Tanager** that Julie West photographed at her feeders in Henderson on 30 June. Because of COVID concerns no visitors were able to see the tanager, which in any case didn't seem to stick around for any length of time. This tanager was also the only true rarity among passerines reported this summer.

Many songbirds seemed to nest later than usual this summer. Several Breeding Bird Atlas volunteers reported that adult songbirds feeding young or carrying food were unexpectedly hard to find during late June and early July, usually the peak of the nesting season. Numbers of adults with dependent young seemed to peak later in July than usual, and for some species, especially Eastern Wood-Pewee and Red-eyed Vireo, the peak did not arrive until mid-August. Adult Cerulean Warblers were seen feeding young in Dekalb on 26 June and attending a begging juvenile on Fort Drum on 27 July, dates at which this species is usually just about impossible to find. Other species seen feeding young at or after reported late nesting dates include Blue-winged Warbler, Nashville Warbler, and Black-throated Green Warbler. Many Breeding Bird Atlas volunteers seemed to have trouble confirming species in 2020, and one reason for this difficulty may have been that they stopped collecting data too early in the season.

For the summer I received reports of 212 species, about seven species higher than the most recent ten-year average, but only two species higher than the most recent five-year mean. During the roughly 15 years I have been editing the Region 6 report species tallies have gradually increased, especially for the summer season, thanks mostly to the increasing number of birders visiting the Region from elsewhere, with summer 2020 seeing a particularly large number of visiting birders. Unfortunately, despite the large number of observers in the field relatively few atlas blocks received more than cursory attention, and it is hoped that in the next few years visitors can be directed to uncovered blocks rather than just hitting the same handful of hotspots.

CONTRIBUTORS

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFWMA – Ashland Flats WMA; **CBn** – Chaumont Barrens Pres; **CV** – T Cape Vincent; **FD** – Fort Drum Military Reservation, JEFF & LEWI; **ICNC** – Indian Creek Nature Center, T Canton, STLA; **JEFF** – Jefferson County; **LBSF** – Lonesome Bay State Forest, T Hammond; **LGI** – Little Galloo I; **LPd** – Leonard Pd trail, T Colton; **LWMA** – Lakeview WMA; **MM** – Massawepie Mire, T Colton & Piercefield, STLA; **PRWMA** – Perch Ri WMA, JEFF; **RLT** – Richard’s Landing Dike trail, T Massena; **RRT** – Remington Recreation Trail, T Canton; **SLR** – St. Lawrence Ri; **STLA** – St. Lawrence County; **ULLWMA** – Upper and Lower Lakes WMA, T Canton; **WEP** – Winona Experimental Forest, T Lorraine; **WGSP** – Whetstone Gulf SP; **WHWMA** – Wilson Hill WMA; **WISP** – Wellesley I SP; **WP** – Whalen P, T Louisville.

WATERFOWL – HUMMINGBIRDS

Brant: flock over FD 1 Jun only report.

Mute Swan: max 12 T Clayton 8 Aug.

Trumpeter Swan: max 22 ULLWMA 7 Jun where at least 4 pr fledged y; breeding confirmed 9 blocks; increasing.

Wood Duck: max 300 PRWMA 6 Jun.

Blue-winged Teal: breeding confirmed AFWMA, FD, PRWMA & ULLWMA; max 245 WP 28 Aug.

Northern Shoveler: 3 WHWMA 1 Jun; WHWMA 16 Aug; 2 PRWMA 8 Aug; only reports.

Gadwall: max 9 WHWMA 31 Jul.

American Wigeon: 6 ULLWMA 14 Jul possible brood.

American Black Duck: max 6 PRWMA 2 Aug.

Northern Pintail: 2 WHWMA 28 Aug only report.

Green-winged Teal: 2 WHWMA 1 Jun only report before mid-Jul; unclear whether reports

of 2-3 latter half July PRWMA & WHWMA local breeders or early migrants.

Ring-necked Duck: at least 15-20 broods ULLWMA thru; f with 2 y FD 7 Jul only other confirmed nesting & apparently only 2nd JEFF breeding record (*intro*).

Common Goldeneye: ad f with 2 small chicks near Picton Is SLR July (BM).

Hooded Merganser: breeding confirmed 7 blocks.

Common Merganser: max 32 RLT 11 & 22 Aug.

Red-breasted Merganser: 2 WISP 11 Jul (KR) only report.

Ruffed Grouse: breeding confirmed 16 blocks mostly SE STLA.

Spruce Grouse: 7 reports MM inc f with 2 y 18 Jul (JM, LS); 2 Cranberry L Wild Forest 17 Jul (JM, LS).

Pied-billed Grebe: max 36 ULLWMA 8 Aug.

Red-necked Grebe: ad SLR T Louisville 21 Aug (NK.), early.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo: 60+ reports from 35+ locations; high.

Black-billed Cuckoo: about 80 reports more than usual; max 10 FD 13 Jun.

Common Nighthawk: distraction display FD 22 Jun where up to 12 per day Jun & Jul; T Diana & T Fowler 7 Jun only breeding season reports away from FD (although within 5 km of FD).

Eastern Whip-poor-will: nest adjacent to CBn trail (mob) only confirmed nesting; max 50 FD 8 Jun.

RAILS – TROPICBIRDS

Virginia Rail: max 7 ULLWMA 27 Jun; nesting confirmed FD & ULLWMA.

Sora: max 3 ULLWMA 27 Jun.

Common Gallinule: max 22 PRWMA 6 Jun; nesting confirmed LWMA, FD, PRWMA, ULLWMA & WHWMA.

Sandhill Crane: T Hammond 13 Jun (ET); ad w 2 y T Clayton 3 Jul (RB); ULLWMA 26 Jul (JB); 2 T Madrid 31 Jul (JB); 2 ULLWMA 26 Aug (BD).

Black-bellied Plover: max 7 WHWMA 1 Jun where last spring migrants 4 Jun; RLT 21 Aug only southbound report.

Semipalmated Plover: last northbound WHWMA 1 Jun; arr WHWMA 31 Jul; max 20 PRWMA 5 Aug.

Upland Sandpiper: max 8+ terr FD Jun-Jul where ad w juv 10 Jul (JB); ad with juv 2 locations < 1 km apart T Clayton 19 Jun (JC,

PR, AS, BW); additional reports T Lyme & T Orleans.

Whimbrel: T Alexandria 19 Jul (SD) only report.

HUDSONIAN GODWIT (R6): ad RLT 6-11 Aug (JB, mob), rare R6.

Ruddy Turnstone: LWMA 25 Jul; RLT 6 Aug; Dark Is shoals 30 Aug; more reports than usual.

Stilt Sandpiper: PRWMA 8 Aug (AC, SD); Whetstone Gulf Reservoir 28 Aug (MR); only reports.

Sanderling: arr LWMA 15 Jul; 5 reports Aug.

Baird's Sandpiper: ad PRWMA 5 Aug; 2 juvs T Clayton 20-25 Aug, PRWMA 21 & 29 Aug & RLT 28 Aug.

Least Sandpiper: arr WHWMA 12 Jul; max 90 PRWMA 21 Aug.

White-rumped Sandpiper: ad WHWMA 2 Aug; T Henderson 30 Aug.

Pectoral Sandpiper: arr WHWMA 20 Jul; max 3 WHWMA 2 Aug.

Semipalmated Sandpiper: arr WHWMA 12 Jul; max 20 PRWMA 19 Aug.

Short-billed Dowitcher: *hendersoni* WHWMA 12-31 Jul; max 5 PRWMA 17 Aug.

American Woodcock: breeding confirmed AFWMA & T Morley; broods seemed unusually scarce.

Wilson's Snipe: max 13 PRWMA 24 Jul.

Spotted Sandpiper: max 21 RLT 24 Aug.

Solitary Sandpiper: arr WHWMA 12 Jul.

Lesser Yellowlegs: arr T Clayton 9 Jul; max 32 WHWMA 20 Jul.

Greater Yellowlegs: arr WHWMA 12 Jul; max 29 WHWMA 20 Jul.

Bonaparte's Gull: arr PRWMA 24 Jul; max 7 RLT 21 Aug.

Little Gull: SLR T Alexandria 23 Jul (MMC)

Ring-billed Gull: max approx 40,000 LGI 16 Jun.

Herring Gull: max 1247 nests LGI 16 Jun record high.

Great Black-backed Gull: max 4 WP 24 Aug.

Caspian Tern: max 2280 nests LGI 16 Jun 33% higher than 2019 but similar to recent mean.

Black Tern: max 65 PRWMA & 60 ULLWMA on NYSDEC surveys; also present WHWMA, White Swamp T Alexandria & Wilson Bay marsh CV; R6 accounted for 58% state-wide total on NYSDEC surveys.

Common Tern: 626 nests L St. Lawrence continues 5-year decline since record high in 2015; 1.6 y fledged/nest best success in 10

years (LH); nest on log LWMA 3 Jun (MB) 2nd year nest at this site.

LOONS – PARAKEET

Common Loon: breeding confirmed 10 blocks.

Double-crested Cormorant: max approx. 2000 LGI 16 Jun.

AMERICAN WHITE PELICAN (R6): WHWMA 1-6 Jun (JF, mob, photos!).

BROWN PELICAN: Dark Is shoals SLR 31 Aug (GSe, mob, photos!).

American Bittern: max 9 FD 12 Jun; nesting confirmed 2 blocks FD.

Least Bittern: max 5 LWMA 15 Jul; nesting confirmed LWMA, FD, ULLWMA & WHWMA.

Great Blue Heron: max 40 WHWMA 6 June.

Great Egret: max 28 WHWMA 15 Aug.

Green Heron: max 8 PRWMA 24 Jul.

Black Vulture (R6): T Potsdam 12 Jun (SS); T Carthage 18 Jun (MP); rare R6.

Turkey Vulture: nest w y T Edwards 10 Aug only breeding confirmation.

Osprey: confirmed 36 blocks R6 compared to 27 all of BBA II.

Northern Harrier: breeding confirmed 5 blocks.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: ad w 2 y LPd 7 Aug.

Cooper's Hawk: found in 12 atlas blocks but no breeding confirmations.

Northern Goshawk: 2 juv at nest site FD 20 Jul.

Bald Eagle: breeding confirmed in 10 atlas blocks.

Red-shouldered Hawk: carrying nest material near Indian R WMA 18 Apr only confirmed breeding.

Eastern Screech-Owl: different locations FD 4 Jun & 6 Jul only reports.

Long-eared Owl: MM 15 June only report (RZ).

Short-eared Owl: up to 3 per day FD early Jun not seen after 24 Jun.

Northern Saw-whet Owl: FD 19 Jun only report (PR).

Red-headed Woodpecker: confirmed 2 atlas blocks FD; WISP 10 Jul only other report.

Black-backed Woodpecker: multiple reports MM & LPd; near Horseshoe L 4 Jul only other report.

Merlin: nesting confirmed T Massena & PRWMA.

Peregrine Falcon: juv T Canton 31 Jul.

FLYCATCHERS – SNOW BUNTING

Eastern Kingbird: max 31 FD 21 Aug.

Olive-sided Flycatcher: last obvious spring migrant T Adams 8 Jun; max 6 MM 5 Jun likely migrants & breeders; fall migrants arr T Lyonsdale 23 Aug.

Eastern Wood-Pewee: many adults feeding y FD 15-30 Aug.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: max on breeding grounds 7 MM 5 Jun; last obvious northbound migrant FD 10 Jun; FD 31 Aug only obvious southbound migrant.

Alder Flycatcher: max 46 FD 8 Jun.

Willow Flycatcher: max 20 FD 12 Jun.

Philadelphia Vireo: T Fine 14 Jun & MM 19 Jul only breeding season reports; arr Baker Woods Preserve 20 Aug.

Canada Jay: max 5 Cranberry L Wild Forest 17 Jul.

Horned Lark: different locations FD 4 Jun & 7 Jul; T Canton 31 Jul; only reports.

Boreal Chickadee: no reports despite much effort MM and other sites where nested recently.

Sedge Wren: singles at 3 locations T Canton Jun & Jul (BD, JB, mob); 2 AFWMA 17 Jul (SK); PRWMA 13 Jun where 2 19 Jun (SM, PL, PR); max 4 terr FD where ad feeding juv 24 Jul (JB); low.

Carolina Wren: Murry I 10-12 Jul & T Hammond 8-9 Aug only reports.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: max 5 LBSF 4 Jul.

Golden-crowned Kinglet: breeding confirmed 6 block all in Adirondacks.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet: many reports MM where max 3 15 Jun; 3 other locations T Fine.

Swainson's Thrush: max 4 MM multiple dates; Clarkson Univ 27 Aug only report outside Adirondacks & Tug Hill.

Northern Mockingbird: multiple reports FD where nest w 4 y 4 Aug; CBN 29 Jun (RS) only report elsewhere.

Evening Grosbeak: Cranberry L Wild Forest 17 Jul (JM, LS) only report.

Purple Finch: max 11 T Croghan 11 Jul.

Red Crossbill: 15 reports mostly Adirondacks but several reports from lowlands Aug; max 6 Brantingham L 9 Aug.

White-winged Crossbill: MM 9 Jun (JC); T Constableville 28 Jun (JA, DE).

Pine Siskin: MM 6 Aug & L Ozonia 22 Aug only reports.

**NEW WORLD SPARROWS –
CARDINALIDS**

Clay-colored Sparrow: max 19 FD 28 Jun.

Vesper Sparrow: max 27 FD 6 Jul.

Grasshopper Sparrow: max 21 FD 3 Jul.

Henslow's Sparrow: 4 CBn thru 27 Jul (mob);
max 6 PRWMA Jun & Jul; only reports!

Lincoln's Sparrow: max 11 MM 18 Jul.

Orchard Oriole: 2 locations T Henderson 5-9
Jun & 3 Jul only reports (SA).

Rusty Blackbird: Janack's Landing trail T
Fine 28 Jun & 7 Aug (BC); 2 MM 9 Jun & 18
Jul (JC, JM, LS); only reports.

Louisiana Waterthrush: T Rodman 6 Jun
(SK); WGSP 14-16 Jun (SM, PL); Downerville
SF thru 16 Jul SF (mob).

Northern Waterthrush: ad carrying food FD
29 Jul only breeding confirmation R6.

Golden-winged Warbler: breeding confirmed
4 blocks R6; max 8 LBSF 6 Jun.

Blue-winged Warbler: breeding confirmed
CBn & 7 atlas blocks FD; max 13 FD 3 Jun.

"Brewster's" Warbler: f performing
distraction display FD 3 Jun; 17 from 10
locations Jun & Jul.

"Lawrence's" Warbler: male carrying food
FD 1 Jul.

Tennessee Warbler: Horseshoe Bog 13 Jun
(LF) & MM 18 Jul (JM, LS) only breeding
season reports; ICNC 8 Aug surely early
migrant (VR, SS); main arr T Potsdam 26 Aug.

Mourning Warbler: breeding confirmed
WEP, 2 blocks FD, 2 blocks T Colton; max 13
WEP 15 Jul.

Hooded Warbler: 8 reports from at least 5
locations T Ellisburg where max 4 WEP 15 Jul
inc only breeding confirmation R6; CBn 5 Jun
only other report.

Cape May Warbler: arr Murray I 16 Aug.

Cerulean Warbler: ad f feeding juv T Dekalb
26 Jul; begging juv FD 27 Jul.

Northern Parula: different locations FD 13
Jun & 21 Jul; CBn 14 Jun; CV 18 Jul; more
than usual outside Adirondacks.

Magnolia Warbler: CBn thru 7 Jul (mob) &
nearby T Brownville 7 Jun (JM, LS) only
reports in L Ontario Plain or St. Lawrence
Valley.

Bay-breasted Warbler: arr RRT 27 Aug.

Blackpoll Warbler: last spring migrant T
Henderson 3 Jun; early southbound arr WEP 9
Aug.

Black-throated Blue Warbler: breeding
confirmed 9 blocks all in Adirondacks.

Palm Warbler: breeding confirmed MM &
Horeseshoe bog; present 6 blocks R6.

Prairie Warbler: max 26 FD 7 Jun.

Canada Warbler: max 12 MM 1 Jun.

Wilson's Warbler: arr RRT 27 Aug.

WESTERN TANAGER: T Henderson
feeders 30 Jun (JW, photos!) 1st regional
record.