

PATCH BIRDING BEAVER LAKE NATURE CENTER

Joseph Brin
Baldwinsville, NY

Beaver Lake Nature Center is an Onondaga County Park located four miles west of Baldwinsville, NY. It encompasses 660 acres. One third is the lake itself. It also has wooded areas, an extensive bog, and some open areas. The varied habitats result in good birding year-round. There are seven main trails which cover nine miles so all habitats are accessible. One trail encircles the lake. Trails are open year-round and the area is mostly flat. There are many places along the lake trail to set up a scope to observe waterfowl.

eBird shows 221 species seen at the park. Thirty-two species of waterfowl, twenty-eight warblers and six owl species have been seen. Eighty species are known breeders including thirteen warblers. A specialty of Beaver Lake are the Saw-whet Owls which are seen on the Bog Trail in late winter to early spring. The bog area in particular has seen a rise in water level in the past two years resulting in some of the cedars, which the Saw-whets prefer to rest in during the day, being damaged. However, they have been observed this year. They are probably breeding but haven't been confirmed yet. Long-eared Owls have been seen there also. Eastern Screech-Owl, Barred Owl, and Great Horned Owl have been confirmed and are seen each year.

After I retired from teaching in Baldwinsville I started to bird more at Beaver Lake and got to know the naturalists. Subsequently I was asked if I would volunteer to do bird walks. I readily agreed and I now conduct morning bird walks Mondays and Tuesdays in April, May, and June to observe the spring migration. I was a music teacher and identifying birds by song came naturally to me. This is an advantage as I can identify unseen warblers to beginning birders on our walks, especially in wooded and brushy areas. Ground breeding warblers such as Hooded and Mourning are common here but hard to see. For a few years we had an inquisitive Ruffed Grouse which would greet anyone who went through his territory. One of my favorite pictures is "Rocky the Grouse" standing on the head of noted bird guide author Richard Crossley as he tried to take photos of him. (See photo p. 371).

In the years since I have been birding here changes in the birds mostly reflect what we see everywhere in the state. There is less activity in fall migration but still enough activity to make it a great destination for birding any time of year.

In addition to the great year-round birding, Beaver Lake Nature Center offers a wide array of other indoor and outdoor activities. Kayaks and canoes are available for rent for private individuals or organized tours. Cross country and snowshoe trails are well marked and equipment is available to those who don't have their own. School group walks and talks are held throughout the school year. Maple sugaring and salamander hunts are popular springtime activities. Wellness

programs are available to young and old participants. Yearly memberships are available with many programs offered, and day passes are available also.

I have now birded at Beaver Lake for almost 30 years and would be happy to guide anyone who would like to join me on a bird walk.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON, SUMMER 2021

Michael F. Cooper

mikec02@optonline.net

June of 2021 came in a bit drier than average through most of the state, but by July and August nearly everyone was seeing rainfall above—in some cases far above—normal levels. June was generally a bit cooler than average, but both July and August were hotter than normal across the board.

Rainfall, or lack thereof, has its effects on many of the locations that we rely on for bird finding. Low water levels at the right time can attract migrating shorebirds, while higher levels might be an aid to breeding ducks and other water birds. Montezuma NWR in Region 3 reported high counts for several expected species of waterfowl; for most of the neighboring Regions numbers seemed to be about average. Among the more unusual sightings, Snow Geese lingered into June and July in five Regions, a Eurasian Wigeon at Montezuma in Region 3 in late August was surprisingly early, and two Regions reported June Brant, birds bringing up the rear of northbound migration.

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were reported from three locations in Region 3, and two locations from Region 10. I'm tempted to say "only" two Regions reported them this year vs. three in Summer 2020. Four different King Eiders summered in Region 10, all immature males. A female Common Goldeneye with four young provided a rare breeding record for Region 6. Common Mergansers are widespread breeders throughout much of our non-coastal areas, but a flock of 12 on Staten Island in Region 10 was surprising. They often don't show up downstate until the first freeze of winter. Trumpeter Swans seem to be, at minimum, holding their own, with reports coming from five Regions. Upper and Lower Lakes WMA in Region 6 seems to be a major stronghold.

Wild Turkey is apparently the only New York chicken doing well, but one report of a covey of 18 Ruffed Grouse in the town of Van Etten in Region 3 must have been a nice find. Pied-billed Grebes were present in eight Regions, about typical, but high counts in the Region 2 section of Montezuma were about half of what they were last year.

A Eurasian Collared-Dove was at Hamlin Beach in Region 2 on 29 August. One seems to pop up somewhere in the state every year or so and judging by the reactions of birders in other parts of the country, it's nice that they remain as interesting novelties and nothing more. Several upstate Regions mentioned



Long-tailed Jaeger, Jacob Riis Park, *Queens*, 23 Aug 2021, © Doug Gochfeld.



Richard Crossley and “Rocky,” Beaver Lake Nature Center, *Onondaga*, 3 Dec 2013, © Joseph Brin. See Patch Birding piece, pp. 335-336.