

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SPRING 2022

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The spring 2022 season started and ended with above average temperatures across the state, sandwiched around a slightly cooler than normal April. Rainfall was mostly below average in the western Regions, normal or slightly above in the eastern sections.

As the years go by, it's clear that some of our "rare" birds continue to become less rare over time. Two examples would be Ross's and Greater White-fronted Geese—both still scarce, but in recent years multiples are reported from most Regions. Our Region 1 editors call Ross's Goose "an expected, annual spring migrant". Sandhill Crane is another, with at least eight Regions reporting them. In Region 4, Lance Verderame commented "It appears this species is becoming an expanding and consistent breeder in Chenango County."

Warm temperatures left many waterways more open than normal, and waterfowl numbers in general were good. Observers made spectacular counts of 500,000 – 600,000 Snow Geese in the Montezuma WMA in Regions 2 and 3. The same area produced the state's second record for Tundra Bean-Goose. Elsewhere, Pink-footed Geese were reported from Regions 9 and 10, and Barnacle Goose was found in Region 4. And at the opposite end of the state, a Black-bellied Whistling Duck was a first for Richmond County in Region 10. Trumpeter Swans continued their march towards the inevitable, with birds recorded in at least seven Regions, and a statewide high of 26 at Upper and Lower Lakes in Region 6.

Some of the more expected rarities included two Brant in Region 1, a Eurasian Green-winged Teal in Region 2, Tufted Ducks in Regions 3 and 7, and Eurasian Wigeon from at least six Regions. King Eiders were found in Regions 1 and 2, where rare, and an even rarer Common Eider remained through the period at Braddock Bay in Region 2. A Cinnamon Teal at Groveland Flats provided only the second Region 2 record of this statewide rarity. Quite unexpected was a Mottled Duck found by a very astute birder at Ketcham's Creek in Region 10—a first state record and a long staying bird that put on a show for many observers.

Northern Bobwhites were found in at least four Regions, with captive origins suspected for most, if not all. This species does not seem to be able to survive without artificial supplements to its population, even in the sweltering climes of Region 10. The same probably applies to the few scattered records of Ring-necked Pheasant. Ruffed Grouse seems to have been a bit easier to find this spring than in recent years, with comments like “many reports throughout entire Region” from Region 4. Is there cause for some cautious optimism or is someone releasing these as well?

Long-legged waders were about normal, with scattered Yellow-crowned Night-Herons, Little Blue Herons and Snowy Egrets away from the coast. White-faced Ibises were picked out in Regions 1 and 2 and Glossies were found in nearly every Region. A White Ibis in Brooklyn in Region 10 was a great find. When Brendan Fogarty in Region 10 says “no spoilers” but then spills the beans about this bird being “the first of many” for 2022, it makes me very happy that I wasn't watching Game of Thrones with him. Further east on Long Island, a Great White Heron put in a brief appearance at Shinnecock.

Sora and Virginia Rails seemed to be pretty widespread as did American Coot and Common Gallinule. A King Rail in Region 10 was an amazing find, seen keeping company with a Clapper Rail through the season.

Region 3 turned up some premium shorebird sightings with a Curlew Sandpiper 13-14 May and a Baird's Sandpiper 29 May. A black Ruff in Region 1 was a great find, as was a Marbled Godwit in Region 2. Rare-in-spring American Golden-Plovers were scattered across the state. A count of 52 Red Knots at Conewango Swamp in Region 1 was an exceptional inland tally. A Least Sandpiper photographed on 13 March in Region 10 was exceptionally early.

Looking at other waterbirds, a Neotropic Cormorant photographed in Newburgh was a first for Region 9. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were reported from nearly every Region and a Franklin's at Sodus Point in Region 2 was the only one noted statewide. A Magnificent Frigatebird lingered around the Orient area in Region 10.

No doubt The Event of Spring 2022 was the incursion of Arctic Terns into inland sections of the Northeast, including the southern mainland areas of New York State.

Check the accounts from the Regional editors for Regions 8 and 9 for a sense of the excitement and astonishment that observers from southern Pennsylvania through New England experienced on the morning of 13 May. Apparently, a strong easterly flow of air produced strong onshore winds that pushed large numbers of Arctic Terns past coastal points and into areas where they are almost never encountered.

Bill Ostrander in Region 3 reports good counts of both cuckoo species, attributed to the caterpillars that typically drive cuckoo numbers. Nightjars are one group where news is nearly always dire. This spring, though, there were a couple of slightly more encouraging reports, with nice counts of Common Nighthawk in Region 5, 40 counted on one date in Region 4, and “encouraging” numbers of Whip-poor-will in Region 8.

Golden Eagles continue to become less surprising statewide and scattered Swallow-tailed and Mississippi Kites seemed to be about normal. A Swainson’s Hawk at Derby Hill in Region 5 was the only one reported, but the Top Raptor Award has to go to the Zone-tailed Hawk photographed at Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn, Region 10. Whether this is the individual that has journeyed up and down the east coast for the past several years is up for debate, but this represents the first time it has been fully documented in New York.

A remarkable one-day tally of 458 Red-bellied Woodpeckers on the Buffalo Ornithological Society May Count was indicative of a strong showing statewide by many woodpecker species. In some cases, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker for example, this may have been a result of birds overwintering through a mild winter.

Empidonax flycatchers as well as Olive-sided seemed to be pretty widely reported, although counts seemed low to average, with the exception of Willow. The Buffalo spring count tallied 209 Willows, a count record. Best among the flycatcher tribe was a Western Kingbird photographed at Beechwood SP in Region 2.

Bicknell’s Thrush continues to hold on in the few breeding locations left in Regions 7, 8, and 9, and a small handful were detected as migrants in Region 10. Most “winter” finch species lingered into the early part of the period, but Red Crossbill remained widespread and in good numbers and apparently bred throughout large swaths of the state.

There were a lot of reports of “southern” passerines—maybe indicating a look into our future? In Region 1, Yellow-throated Warblers were noted as making a strong showing, while three Summer Tanagers and a Kentucky Warbler were rarities. Yellow-throated and Kentucky Warblers were reported from four Regions, Summer Tanagers from five. In Region 2, 35 species of warblers were topped by a Kirtland’s on 15 May, one day before another was seen in Region 6. A Smith’s Longspur in Region 2 provided a first Regional record there. A Yellow-breasted Chat caught at the Crown Point banding station in Region 7 provided the first record in the eBird database. Two western warblers added spice to the birding scene in Brooklyn—a Black-throated Gray in late April and a Townsend’s in late May. A Western Tanager and a Painted Bunting, also in Region 10, are becoming fairly routine “rarities”, but two Western Tanagers in Region 2 were a bit more surprising.

A one-day count of 700 Rusty Blackbirds passing Derby Hill in Region 5 is pretty impressive. In that same account, David Wheeler’s report on MOTUS tracking sites gives a fascinating glimpse into the movements of individual birds. With birds tagged as far away as Quebec and Colombia, you really get the sense of this hemisphere-wide web of birds, and we are in the middle of it.

Despite there being two new additions to the New York State list this season, I think my choice for Bird of the Season goes to Arctic Tern. The incursion described in the Regional reports and elsewhere provides a peek into the movements of this bird, unfamiliar and little known as it normally passes through parts of the globe that are largely hidden from us. The fact that so many people had opportunities to see a species that normally only occurs along the fringes of our state, I think makes the Arctic Tern incident a special event for many non-coastal observers.

Good birding till next time.



Mottled Duck, Ketcham’s Creek Freshwater Wetland, *Suffolk*, here 14 Apr 2022, © Ernst Mutchnick, first New York State record; see details in Highlights and Region 10 report.



Ruff, Somerset, *Niagara*, here 1 May 2022, © Joel Strong.



Cinnamon Teal, Groveland Flats, *Livingston*, here 29 Mar 2022, © John Gordinier.



Zone-tailed Hawk, Green-Wood Cemetery, *Kings*, 2 Apr 2022, © Seth Barr, first documented New York State record.



Arctic Terns, part of an unprecedented inland incursion in the Northeast 13 May 2022. Left, Glenmere Lake, *Orange*, © Jeanne Cimorelli; right, Basic Creek Reservoir, *Albany*, © Naomi Lloyd. See Highlights and the Region 8, 9, and 10 reports for details.