

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEASON—SUMMER 2022

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The summer of 2022 was ushered in by a slightly cooler than average June, followed by a hot and dry July in most Regions. August was again warmer than normal, with precipitation more of a mixed bag.

Several Regions mentioned that they had unimpressive numbers of most waterfowl. Bob Spahn in Region 2 mentioned some Mallard counts of over 100 and low counts of most other puddle ducks. Region 1, however, recorded high numbers for Wood Duck and Ruddy Duck. There were the expected stragglers from the winter season as well as some nice rarities. I think my favorite among the stragglers was the adult male White-winged Scoter swimming around a farm pond in Columbia County in Region 8. An out-of-season Barnacle Goose in

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Region 1 was the first record there since 2010. A Black-bellied Whistling-Duck was photographed by a non-birder in Region 2, a first for that area, and several others were present in Region 10, where they are now becoming regular.

Ruffed Grouse seemed to be pretty widespread, with nine Regions reporting them, and the comment from Region 6—"Many broods reported"—sounded a hopeful note. A White-winged Dove was photographed at Jones Beach in Region 10. Both cuckoo species seemed to be present in decent numbers, with Yellow-billed confirmed as a breeder for the first time in Clinton County, Region 7. There was speculation that Common Nighthawk may be hanging on as a breeder in Region 1, but elsewhere in the state Regional reporters considered the birds they were seeing as likely migrants. August produced three different Rufous Hummingbirds, in Regions 4, 8 and 9.

A sometimes-cooperative King Rail spent the summer at a salt marsh in Region 10, where it mated with a Clapper Rail. "Kling" Rails were observed throughout the summer. Sandhill Cranes were found in nine Regions and were found breeding in at least five of those.

There were quite a few nice shorebird records from around the state, but the only genuine rarity reported was a Bar-tailed Godwit at Moriches Inlet in Region 10, this of the subspecies *baueri*, a first for NYS. Half of all state records are from this location. Good shorebird records away from the coast included Marbled Godwits in Regions 1, 5 and 9, where one on 23 August provided a first Regional record. Hudsonian Godwits were found in Regions 2, and 5. Upland Sandpipers put in appearances in at least eight Regions but were only mentioned in a breeding context in Regions 5 and 6.

I'm wondering if there's reason for cautious optimism regarding the non-coastal population of Piping Plover. Successful breeding was recorded in Region 5, where two successful nests were observed, and in Region 6, where a pair produced young for the first time in 50 years. A single at Sodus Point in Region 2 was Wayne County's first record, but even more surprising was a hatch year bird at Piermont Pier, which provided a first record for Region 9. Overall, Region 9 produced quite a nice array of shorebirds during the summer of 2022. Besides the aforementioned Marbled Godwit and Piping Plover, there was a Willet at Piermont Pier and a Western Willet was found among a flock of 11 American Avocets! A Red-necked Phalarope was found by John Haas while kayaking—it provided a second Sullivan County record.

Elsewhere, three American Avocets were recorded in Region 1 and a nice variety of shorebirds was found in Region 5, including a Red-necked Phalarope, a Long-billed Dowitcher, and a flock of 25 American Golden Plovers at Sandy Pond, the only double-digit report for the state.

The Region 7 report provides an interesting summary of the ebb and flow of Bonaparte's Gull numbers over the years, and how similar fluctuations in other species that associate with them follow a similar trend. Region 1 observers reported a tally of 4,000 Ring-billed Gulls on 13 August—an impressive number.

There was only one report each of Arctic and Sandwich Tern, both from Long Island. Caspian Tern reports were quite varied, Region by Region, with good numbers reported in Regions 1 and 9 and low numbers found in Regions 2 and 6. The comments from Regions 1, 2 and 6 reflect counts at breeding colonies. Jeff Bolsinger, in Region 6, speculates that the 12% decline there may be due to avian influenza. Meanwhile, the Common Tern colony at Sandy Pond grew to a Regional record high of 495. A Little Gull there on 26 August was the only report for the state.

The usual mix of wading birds was present in most Regions across the state and included Tricolored Herons in Region 1 and Region 6, the latter providing the first Regional record. A White Ibis on 29 August in Region 9 was an excellent find. A flock of White Ibis near Stony Brook in Region 10 grew to a max of seven birds. A Great White Heron at Piermont Pier added to Region 9's impressive list of rarities for the season. In that same Region, the Neotropical Cormorant from the spring report lingered through the summer, and birders there also turned up an Anhinga in Rockland County!

Wrapping up the water birds, offshore pelagic trips in Region 10 picked up the rare but now expected species, like White-faced Storm-Petrel. More impressive, though, are pelagics seen from shore, and the South Polar Skua at Robert Moses SP was the best of that batch.

Day-flying raptor reports were highlighted by two different Swainson's Hawks a few days apart in Region 2, and an attempted nesting by a pair of Mississippi Kites in a neighborhood in Region 8. Bob Spahn in Region 2 has an interesting discussion about mid-summer and late-summer raptor movements along Braddock Bay. Also interesting was the report of a Snowy Owl on 10 June in Region 1 followed by another which showed up five days and 120 miles away in Region 3. Is it known whether or not this was the same bird?

Region 1 editors pointed out that the presence of Breeding Bird Atlas-hired observers no doubt helped produce high counts for some passerine species. William Kuk in Region 4 also pointed out that a lot of observers are now using the Merlin app to help find and document breeding birds. Palm Warbler was confirmed as a breeder in Clinton County in Region 7, a first county record. Also in Region 7, Prairie Warblers were observed on territories just below the Canadian border. A few additional warbler highlights worth mentioning include Cerulean and Kentucky in Region 4 and Prothonotary in Region 5, while Golden-winged is definitely at the opposite end of that spectrum, "vanishing as a Regional breeder" in Region 1 and "now one of our rarest breeding warblers" in Region 5.

Bicknell's Thrush seems to have been a bit more widely reported than in recent years—is this another effect of the Merlin app or perhaps Atlasers spending more time in appropriate habitat? Adding to the Region 9 Rarity Roundup, a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Dutchess County was a great find. More tantalizing was a Loggerhead Shrike seen at Croton Point in mid-June, with an additional sighting in early August. Was that the same bird, and if so, where was it during those intervening six weeks?

Several Regions mentioned breeding by Red Crossbills, while others pointed out that Pine Siskins were scarce through the season. Comments regarding grassland breeding passerines were mixed, which is probably an improvement over recent years when the outlook was more uniformly dire. July and August Bobolink counts of 200-300 are impressive, but a count of 4650 at Queen Catherine Marsh in Region 3 seems to be on another level! The same Region produced a high count of 50 Eastern Meadowlarks. Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows are at least holding on in a number of locations, but overall they seem to be continuing their downward trend. Region 1 editors made the interesting observation that Vesper Sparrows are being found in vineyards and orchards. It would be great to see that disappearing species find a new niche to move in to.

Dave Wheeler's Region 5 brief history of Henslow's Sparrow is a great read, as is his recap of recent MOTUS returns of radio-tagged birds. Fascinating stuff. Shai Mitra's comments regarding August records of Myrtle Warbler are likewise interesting. These are birds showing up several hundred miles south of their breeding range six to eight weeks earlier than the bulk of their migrating congeners.

Summer 2022 provided birders with quite a few interesting sightings, including some Regional rarities. But really, there was only one bird that might make the cut as a "Mega" and for that reason, I think the Bird of the Season has to be the Bar-tailed Godwit that spent two weeks parading around on the mudflats at Moriches Inlet, Suffolk County.

As always, thanks for reading and I look forward to seeing what you all find in the upcoming seasons.

Much of the data in the Regional reports is sourced from eBird: eBird Basic Dataset. Version: EBD_relAug-2022. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York. Aug 2022.