

The Changing Seasons

by James Tate, Jr.*

The Nesting Season, 1975. A variety of interesting range expansions, pioneering records, and trends.

This edition of the Changing Seasons covers the months of June and July, a period that is commonly thought to be the breeding season for most of the temperate latitude birds. Actually in North America the breeding season extends from before the beginning of the year until well into autumn, depending on latitude. Further north into the arctic parts of Canada, the nesting season is only at midpoint by the time the Nesting Season Regional reports are due. Twenty-one regions have contributed to this Changing Seasons; from these the article to follow will cover trends, portents, and rarities.

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It was an interesting summer. Throughout the Atlantic states and into Ontario and Québec, tardy spring migrants lingered well beyond the first of June. Hot, dry weather prevailed over the northern provinces and states throughout June and July. Water levels were very low. Observers from the Hudson-Delaware Region south to Florida reported a dry June and an excessively wet July. The tropical depression "Amy" passed off the coast between the 28th of June and the 1st of July. Breeding was essentially well advanced by then for most of the marsh- and beach-nesting birds, so reported damage was at a minimum. All eastern states and provinces reported a generally successful breeding season. The central section of

the United States had no unusual precipitation events in a widely successful nesting season. The western prairies, the mountain and inter-mountain regions experienced a wet and late spring. Snow pack was slow in melting off. Early spring rains gave a considerable amount of vegetative growth from the northern plains to the Southwest. In many areas, however, the rainfall ceased a little earlier than in some years, leaving late June and July with below-average precipitation. Throughout these areas, the summer of 1975 was generally a successful bird-nesting year. The entire Pacific coast from Alaska to southern California reported a late cold spring starting off a relatively cloudy and damp, cold and normal summer. There were some early nest failures, with re-nesting attempts occurring most noticeably among passerines.

LOONS AND GREBES

Nesting success for Common Loons and Pied-billed Grebes was good in the eastern part of the United States and Canada. Numbers of non-breeding summering loons appeared as far south as the Southern Atlantic Coast Region and into the Central Southern states.

PELAGICS

On the Atlantic Coast, the pelagic scene was highlighted by the appearance of two Black-capped Petrels off Cape Hatteras on May 18th. The Hudson-Delaware Region contributed a remarkable pelagic report covering a number of offshore trips into the New York Bight. Among the more interesting observations were those of Northern Fulmar, Great (?) Skua, and four Long-tailed Jaegers which were seen on June 15th. From the Middle Atlantic Coast Region and the Florida Region came reports of a heavy die-off of Greater Shearwaters from the end of June through the beginning of July. Reports of pelagics on the Pacific Coast were dominated by the Northern Pacific Coast Region report of an estimated 20,000 Sooty Shearwaters which appeared in late July off Tillamook County, Oregon. Dead Slender-billed Shearwaters along the beach and ocean shores there were unexplained. Unlike previous years, no Black Storm-Petrels were seen in the Middle Pacific Coast Region this year. Alaska and the Southern Pacific Coast had relatively little to report.

LONG-LEGGED WADERS

The Hudson-Delaware Region and the Florida

Region are to be commended for their systematic and careful surveys of colonial nesters. Detailed data are found in these regions' reports. The Middle Atlantic Coast report includes a brief summary of heronries and a remarkable sighting of 905 Black-crowned Night Herons on Fisherman's Island, Virginia. The loss of large numbers of nestling herons at the Savannah Refuge heronry owing to a heavy July rainstorm was reported by the Southern Atlantic Coast Region. The Cory's Least Bittern, a very rare melanistic phase of the Least Bittern, appeared, amazingly, in two of the eastern reports. Florida has had tremendous success in coordinating surveys of wading-bird nesting colonies throughout the state. With two extensive surveys being conducted, we are beginning to see an admirable volume of meaningful data coming in. Wood Stork nesting has been remarkably successful. The report stated that if most years were as productive as 1975, the Florida Wood Stork population likely would be able to maintain its population levels. The South Texas report makes an interesting correlation between the success of White Ibis and the coating of seed rice with the insecticide Aldrin. Apparently the bird has responded well to the elimination of this contaminant in its environment. Wisconsin recorded its first nesting record of a Snowy Egret, and on June 5 a Louisiana Heron was found in Wayne County. New Mexico recorded first nesting records for two species of herons, the Little Blue Heron and the Cattle Egret. A problem in heron colony management came up at the Audubon Canyon Ranch in California, where raccoons were learning to scale the redwood trees. The Central Southern report contains an interesting comment about the introduced population of Brown Pelicans in Louisiana. The author believes that the pelicans have remained on the seasonal cycle typical of their south Florida homeland. Because this breeding cycle makes them subject to late Louisiana storms, the species has experienced grave problems in establishing successful colonies.

WATERFOWL

The usual sightings of non-nesting waterfowl are included in most reports. Fulvous Tree Ducks appeared at several locations on the Atlantic Coast. Gadwalls apparently are continuing their increase throughout the Atlantic and northern Great Lakes states. Wintering reports also showed an increase in Gadwalls. Mottled Ducks are now appearing with regularity in Florida. The Ontario Region report gives continued evidence of the northeastward expansion of the Mallard into Black Duck habitat, with a review of nest records

from the Ontario Nest Record Card Scheme. The first nesting record of Black Duck for Saskatchewan appears in the Northern Great Plains report. Large Numbers of Wood Ducks bred in the southern and western portions of Minnesota. Plenty of water on the marshlands and prairies of the Northern Great Plains resulted in a good nesting season for waterfowl in general. There was sufficient water early, so that renesting was possible for many species whose nests may have been destroyed by mammals or other predators. Several unusual reports of Black Scoters lingering along the south Atlantic coast appear in the Southern Atlantic Coast Region report. Apparently scoters are summering in Florida on a regular basis. In the Mountain West, however, waterfowl reproduction declined, owing to various conditions including both high water and drought. Tufted Ducks were seen at Iona, Idaho well into June

DIURNAL BIRDS OF PREY

Apparently the Turkey Vulture is slowly expanding its range northward, while decreasing in breeding success in its traditional southern range. Ontario reported Turkey Vultures well established north of Peterborough, and the Niagara-Champlain Region found the species thriving in at least one area. At the same time, the South Atlantic Coast Region reported that both Turkey and Black Vultures appeared to be declining steadily in numbers.

A success story, however, is that of the White-tailed Kite, with increased occurrence in the western states, and appearances in South Texas, Southwest (first New Mexico record), and Florida, and one at the south end of Puget Sound, the northernmost ever on the Pacific Coast. Everglade Kites in the Lake Okeechobee area apparently did well in 1975. New Jersey's second Swallow-tailed Kite is recorded.

A consistent feature of the more northerly reports was the lack of success for the Marsh, Red-shouldered, and even Red-tailed Hawk. Kibbe, in the Niagara-Champlain Region, theorized that the decline in suitable nesting habitat for Marsh Hawks forces the birds into sub-optimal nesting areas where mammalian predation and human disturbance adversely affects breeding success.

In the Mountain West Region, an interesting concentration of post-breeding *Buteos*, including Swainson's Hawk, was noted. Black Hawks appeared in Florida: just one more exotic species to visit that land of unusual tropical and subtropical visitors. The Bald Eagle and the Osprey fared well in parts of the central states. In the Western Great Lakes Region, the Bald Eagle had the best

reproductive success in fifteen years, and the Osprey the best in eleven years. Bald Eagles in Ohio, however, had a 50 per cent drop in nesting pairs. For Osprey, see also the interesting Northern Great Plains Report. On the East Coast, the Osprey appears to be holding its own in the Middle Atlantic Region, where one survey on the western shore of Chesapeake Bay reported 288 nests. Finally, a summer record of a Gyrfalcon over Iona Island in the Gulf of Georgia (British Columbia), was most unexpected.

RAILS AND SHOREBIRDS

Rails mostly made the reports through mentions of Black and Yellow Rail "sightings" (soundings?). Throughout the reports one finds repeated instances of late lingering northward migrants and very early southward migrants appearing almost without hiatus; this summer the early southward movement was particularly heavy. Piping Plovers are practically non-existent in Ontario, according to this year's report. A Marbled Godwit was recorded in Québec on June 12. Ruffs appeared in many of the Atlantic Coast reports, suggesting the possible nesting of the species somewhere in northern Canada. A Long-billed Curlew very courteously allowed hundreds of birders to list it when it appeared near North Line Island in South Oyster Bay, New York. In July a Long-billed Curlew also appeared at Green Bay, Wisconsin. Curiously, the Appalachian report lists the Spotted Sandpiper as possibly in trouble. In the West, spectacular concentrations of shorebirds included about 6000 birds at the north end of Last Mountain Lake in Saskatchewan on June 8, and at Bear River, where 30,000 shorebirds had arrived by the third week in July. On the Pacific Coast, Alaska continues to hold the record for unusual shorebirds. Among the almost unbelievable array of shorebirds that were seen this summer were Long-toed Stint, Greenshank, Common Sandpiper, Polynesian Tattler, Wood Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, and on and on.

JAEGERS, GULLS AND TERNS

Large numbers of jaegers appear in the Northern Pacific Coast report, and a Long-tailed, Virginia's first, is recorded. Virginia also listed a Skua, and one was observed off Cape Hatteras in June; summer records for this species in the Atlantic were virtually unknown until recently. Maryland had its second nesting of the Great Black-backed Gull, on South Island in Chesapeake Bay. Illinois came up with its first breeding record of the Ring-billed Gull, at Lake Calumet. New Mexico's fourth record of the

California Gull was provided this summer by the appearance of 31 birds at Heron Lake. The news from the Western Great Lakes includes Laughing Gull appearances at several locations. Three years of frustrated nesting attempts by Little Gulls in the Western Great Lakes Region are detailed, with the happy ending of the first United States nesting of the species in Brown and Manitowoc counties, Michigan.

A fascinating account on the current breeding situation of terns in the Chandeleur Islands, Louisiana, will be found in Stewart's report. Watch for future nestings of Common Tern in Illinois. Apparently it is in close association with Ring-billed Gulls, and may be the next breeder to be added to the state list. Least Terns, which have been in trouble all along the East Coast, have been turning up in Florida nesting on flat rooftops, some of which have been at least 13 miles from the coast. At Chincoteague, Virginia, a White-winged Black Tern was noted, for the second summer in succession. Finally, Horned Puffins were noted at scattered Pacific Coast locations from Vancouver I. to San Francisco.

FLYCATCHERS THROUGH LARKS

Gray Kingbirds appeared at unusual places, including Sea Island, Georgia, Topsail Beach, North Carolina, and Girtletree, Maryland. An Eastern Kingbird strayed far north to Mendenhall wetlands, near Juneau, Alaska. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, too, made news with extraordinary appearances; one at Fort Peck for a first Montana record, and another in Shawano County, Wisconsin, for a first for that state. A Yellow-bellied Flycatcher appeared near Water Valley, Alberta, for a most unusual occurrence.

Rough-winged Swallows appeared in Brevard County, Florida, for the first time since 1930. All species of swallows were reported doing well in the South Texas Region, with Cliff, Barn, and even Purple Martin worthy of special note. Cliff Swallow nested for the first time in Florida, near Lake Okeechobee. Indiana, too, recorded its first nesting Cliff Swallows, in Hamilton County. The previously-reported increase in Barn Swallow as breeding birds in southern areas continued, with reports coming from North Carolina and Mississippi. In Texas, the species continues to utilize highway culverts for nest sites, as it does in Mississippi. Purple Martins are worthy of special note. There seems some evidence that the species is slowly recovering from the disasters (late frosts and a hurricane) that have devastated the population in recent years in the northeast. On the other hand, the species fared poorly on the Pacific

Coast this year. A record for the species as far north as Wainwright on the Arctic coast is extraordinary. Another unusual report among many from Alaska is that of a Skylark singing near Shemya.

CORVIDS THROUGH SPARROWS

Common Ravens are now established as breeding birds in the mountains of southwestern Pennsylvania, which may explain the rash of recent records from southwestern New York State. The raven may be looked for anywhere in the mountains of this area as a breeder in the near future. In the Southern Atlantic Coast Region, the nesting of Red-breasted Nuthatch near Aedon, North Carolina, was considered highly unusual. Carolina Wren is moving northward as a breeding bird, and there was a record this summer from Chambly, Québec. A Veery in Arizona brings to mind some very old records of this great rarity for the Southwest.

At Gambell, Alaska, a Petchora Pipit, the second for North America, appeared in June.

Three regional reports comment that the Starling may be invading hardwood forests as a new nesting habitat, and thereby may be usurping the nesting cavities of species it previously had not affected. A new bird to add to the Nevada state breeding bird list is the Bell's Vireo. Warblers made news in several regions, with the Farallon Islands, off the California coast, receiving a late drift of lost eastern warblers migrants, including a Kentucky. Washington State reported its first singing male Black-throated Green Warbler, as well as a singing male Chestnut-sided, and a Chestnut-sided also provided Colorado with its second confirmed nesting. In the Southern Pacific Coast Region a Grace's Warbler in the San Bernardino Mountains and a Red-faced Warbler on Clark Mountain were both extremely unusual. Vermont recorded its third record of the Kentucky Warbler, and Yellow-breasted Chat made news in Ontario, where Golden-winged Warblers may be expanding their breeding range.

In Denville, New Jersey, a female Black-headed and a male Rose-breasted were "keeping company" this summer, but breeding was not proved. An interesting commentary on behavior of the Black Rosy Finch is found in the report from the Mountain West. A European Goldfinch appeared on Long Island, in an area where a small colony had existed years ago, but was thought to have disappeared. North Carolina detailed its first evidence of House Finch nesting. Finally, the first North American record of the Reed Bunting was reported, as expected, from Alaska.