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middle atlantic coast region

MARSHALL J. ILIFF

This Summer Season maintained the status quo. Populations which have been expanding in the Region continued to do so. Mississippi Kites have continued to be widely reported in both states. Brown Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants continue their expansion in the Bay, with the pelicans establishing a long-anticipated range expansion into the Maryland Bay. Waterfowl lingered in average numbers. Shorebirds were not well surveyed because of poorer than usual habitat at Hart-Miller Island and Chincoteague. There seemed to be no late push of spring migrants early in the season, though, amazingly, White-throated Sparrows figured prominently (three reports) for the first time ever in this season. Several fall migrants returned unusually early, with some record arrival dates set in July. June was somewhat wetter than usual in the District of Columbia area, while July began a long drought that continued well into the fall.

Several species reported without details were not included. All locations can be assumed to be in Maryland, except that each Virginia locale is annotated the *first time* it appears in the text.

Abbreviations: Assat. (*Assateague I. National Seashore*); Bay (*Chesapeake Bay*); C.B.B.T. (*Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel*); Chinc. (*Chincoteague N.W.R.*); Craney (*Craney I. Disposal Area*); D.C. (*District of Columbia*); Hart (*Hart-Miller Island*); Lower Bay (*Chesapeake Bay from Maryland/Virginia line south*); Middle Bay (*Chesapeake Bay from Bay Bridge to Maryland/Virginia line*); Upper Bay (*Chesapeake Bay north of Bay Bridge*); p.a. (*pending acceptance by state records committee*); P.R.N.A.S. (*Patuxent R. Naval Air Station*); P.L.S.P. (*Pt. Lookout State Park*); P.W.R.C. (*Patuxent Wildlife Research Center*); W.W.T.P. (*Waste Water Treatment Plant*).

LOONS TO DUCKS

The **Pacific Loon** at Haines Pt., D.C., was last reported June 11 (SFa). The 7 Com. Loon reports were typical for summer, but



a Horned Grebe at L. Elkhorn, *Howard*, was most unusual June 12 (DE). Baltimore Canyon, *Worcester*, pelagic trips produced 30 Greater, three Sooty, and one Manx shearwaters, and 100 Wilson's Storm-Petrels June 14 (AE et al.), and three Cory's, 73 Greater, one Sooty, and one Audubon's shearwaters, and 30 Wilson's Storm-Petrels June 21 (AE et al.). Two Audubon's Shearwaters were seen 8 mi off Ocean City, *Worcester*, June 28 (MAT, DC). The Pt. Lookout-Smith I. Ferry in Maryland's Middle Bay continues to be productive for small numbers of Wilson's Storm-Petrels. Three seen June 14 (MC) and four June 21 (JLS) were earlier than most previous reports.

American White Pelicans have built and tended nests on Fisherman I. in recent years, but have yet to put forth a legitimate breeding effort. This year a loner sat atop a Great Back-backed Gull nest June 14 (BW et al.). One Double-crested Cormorant nest was found on Spring I. June 21 (HTA), and the Cheeseman I., *Accomack*, colony also appeared to be healthy with at least 34 large young, 19 other small young, and 3 nests with eggs. In addition, 12 nests were found in *Northampton*, VA, June 16 (BW et al.) for a county first; the nests were on a small island just over the county line with *Accomack* (which has only one previous breeding record, from a duck blind near Chinc.). *Holland I., Dorchester*, supports one of the better heronries in the Bay, with pair counts of 10 Little Blue, 15 Tricolored, 35 Great Blue, and two Green herons, 15 Snowy, five Cattle, and 35 Great egrets, 10 Black-crowned and 12 Yellow-crowned

night-herons, and seven Glossy Ibis June 21 (HTA). This island is fast eroding, but the owner appears to be taking measures to preserve it. An Am. Bittern nest with one chick was found at Huntley Meadows, *Fairfax*, VA, June 22 (AH), where they have nested 3 times previously. Another Am. Bittern was at Elliot I., *Dorchester*, June 27 (GM). A Tricolored Heron at Scotland, *Saint Mary's*, July 15 (PC) was unusual. First evidence of an incursion of White Ibis in the Region was evident July 25 with a juvenile reported from Henricus Park, *Henricus*, VA (MA, LR), followed by a juvenile reported from Lilipons, *Frederick*, the next day (MW). Dyke reports that E. A. Vaughn W.M.A., *Worcester*, did not host nesting Least Bitterns or Com. Moorhens for the 2nd consecutive year and blames their disappearance on a burgeoning Canada Goose population there. Control of the species at small ponds would be a very easy and effective task for state officials. Late lingering geese included a Snow Goose in *Talbot* June 24 (CBM); a blue Snow Goose at Papermill Mudflats, *Baltimore*, July 19 (SWS); and two considerably more unusual Brant which lingered through June 25 at Skimmer I., *Ocean City*, *Worcester*, MD (RH, MWW).

The impoundments at Hart, *Baltimore*, as well as the Bay shore, regularly yield

unusual summering ducks. This year Scarpulla's tally included three N. Shovelers June 20, one Am. Wigeon June 14–20, a Blue-winged Teal July 6, and a probable migrant female N. Pintail July 25. A male Green-winged Teal was curious at E. A. Vaughn June 27 (SHD), though this species has bred twice in Maryland. Elsewhere, a Canvasback was found at Gunther's Pond, *Cecil*, July 2 (LF); a Lesser Scaup was at the Wildfowl Trust, *Queen Anne's*, July 12 (JB); and Ring-necked Ducks were found at 3 locations. A first-summer male Harlequin Duck was at the C.B.B.T., *Northampton*, VA, remaining through the period (v.o.), the 2nd consecutive year that this species has occurred there. Two female Com. Merganser at Anacostia, *Prince George's*, June 21 (PM) were topped only by the Harlequin as the best duck of the season. Breeding records for Hooded Merganser are always notable, and this year a female Hooded Merganser with five grown young was seen at Huntley Meadows June 13 (TB). Red-breasted Mergansers and Ruddy Ducks are our most regular summering divers (Ruddy Duck has bred once in Maryland) and were both widely reported this season (v.o.), including a surprisingly high count of 10 (five male, five female) Ruddy Ducks at Lilipons June 13 (JGr).

HAWKS TO SHOREBIRDS

Mississippi Kites continued their positive trend in the Region. The Woodbridge, *Prince William*, VA, pair produced one young, seen in the nest July 20 (CKF). Additionally, there were several reports from Huntley Meadows June 2–18 (AH, v.o.) which most likely were not the Woodbridge birds. Maryland reports included two at P.R.N.A.S., *Saint Mary's*, June 2 (p.a. KR); four at Dameron, *Saint Mary's*, June 8 (p.a. ph. †PC); and a single at Upper Marlboro June 24 (p.a. JLS). Northern Harriers were seen through the season at Hart (EJS), where they are annual in small numbers in summer. Though the habitat is excellent, they have not yet been found nesting here. A Sharp-shinned Hawk was seen carrying prey at Morgan Run, *Carroll*, June 27 (RFR). Sharp-shinned Hawks have only been known to nest once in Maryland east of the Appalachians, so any summer reports are of interest. Merlins have never previously occurred in Maryland during the summer season, so one at P.R.N.A.S. June 3 (KR) was record-late and another in c. *Howard* July 20 (DH) was (presumably) a record early fall arrival.

June trips to Elliot I. used to produce counts of 15–20 Back Rails, but this year a June 27 (LMD, HLW) trip had just two. The cause for their decline here demands prompt attention. One was heard at Deal, *Somerset*, July 18 (JLS, RL, GMJ) and one at N. Beach, Calvert, July 18 (JLS) was the first reported there in recent decades. King Rails have made Huntley Meadows famous, and the 3 or more families that raised 25 chicks this year were as brazen as ever (AH). There are only a few other reliable places to see the species in the Region, so one at Bethel W.M.A., *Cecil*, July 11 (LF) was notable. Providing one of very few D.C. records, far from its normal habitat and much enjoyed by countless birders, was an ad. **Virginia Rail** in the Enid Haupt Garden on The Mall July 28 (JE, ph., m. ob.) through the season. There was some discussion about the health of the bird (it may have had a wing injury), but it appeared to be surviving well on earthworms in the garden. Sora is a rare breeder in the Region, so the presence of one at a pond near Millington, *Kent*, June 17 (FWF) for the 2nd consecutive year was encouraging. Another Sora was at Hughes Hollow, *Montgomery*, June 10 (HY), and a Com. Moorhen was there June 21 (BB), where they have been irregular in recent years. American Coots nested at the Easton W.W.T.P., *Talbot* (which still provides great habitat for a dense moorhen population),



Young Brown Pelicans at Cheeseman Island, Accomack County, Virginia, on July 29, 1998. Pelicans have nested in coastal Virginia since 1990. They are increasing in the Middle Atlantic Coast region and are now nesting both on coastal islands and within Chesapeake Bay. Photograph/Henry T. Armistead

individuals from farther south. Among 75 individuals at Spring I., *Dorchester*, July 29 (HTA, JSW, DB) were 16 individuals sporting bands, but not color bands. All Brown Pelicans banded n. of North Carolina have been color banded. Reports from *Saint Mary's* have been a good barometer of the species' success in the Bay, and reports continued through the season this year (PC et al.).

SA Brown Pelicans first nested in 1990 on Shank's I., *Accomack*, VA, and the summering population has since shown major increases in the Lower and Middle Bay. In his annual surveys of the Middle Bay islands in *Dorchester* and *Somerset*, H. T. Armistead discovered 15 Brown Pelican nests on Spring I., *Dorchester*, June 21. Of those nests, 3 had three eggs, 9 had 2 eggs, and 3 had one egg. The only other Regional colonies are those coastal colonies at Fisherman I., *Northampton*, VA, and Assateague Bay, *Worcester*. It is also apparent that the summering Bay population of Brown Pelicans is being supplemented by many individuals

for the 2nd consecutive year, confirmed by the chick (and nine adults) there June 20 (JLS, RFR). Other odd individuals were two seen at Hughes Hollow June 20 (RL, JLS) and E. A. Vaughn W.M.A., *Worcester*, July 19 (SHD). Two Sandhill Cranes seen flying ESE in the Coastal Plain at Chestertown, *Kent*, were anomalous July 6 (JG), though we have seen a few recent reports from the Piedmont during this season.

On Assat., *Worcester*, Piping Plovers had their best recent breeding season with at least 55 breeding pairs (*fide* HTA). The territorial male **Snowy Plover** returned to the same stretch of beach on an *Accomack*, VA, barrier island for its 3rd consecutive year. It was seen defending its territory June 16 (BW et al.). Wilson's Plovers are holding on at Virginia's barrier islands, with 45 pairs surveyed on Cedar, Metompkin, and Assawoman islands June 14–17 (BW et al.). A Black-necked Stilt was at Elliot I. June 27 (LMD, HLW et al.) where there are recent summer records but no confirmed nesting as yet. Craney held five Am. Avocets June 15 (JK). An extremely early returning Solitary Sandpiper was at E. A. Vaughn W.M.A. June 27 (SHD). Two Willets at Chesapeake Beach, *Calvert*, June 17 (DBY) were notable on the W. Shore. Always hard to find in Maryland was a Marbled Godwit at Skimmer I. July 29 (HTA). Western Sandpipers are very scarce spring migrants in the East, so one adult at Hart June 6 (EJS) with other late spring migrants was a good find. Shorebird numbers at Hart were generally quite low as the habitat there was not ideal this season, but some notable species were seen. The alternate-plumaged ad. **Curlew Sandpiper** reported in the spring remained through at least June 6 (p.a. †EJS), and another (or the same?) was there July 25 (p.a. †EJS, JLS, RL, BD) but departed to the south that same day. Maryland had only 2 well-documented records prior to this year. Perhaps less expected was a juv. Dunlin on the extremely early dates of July 11–18 (EJS). A Red Knot June 6 is always notable in the Upper Bay. Returning single Pectoral Sandpipers at Hart (EJS) and Chesapeake Farm, *Kent*, July 6 (JG) were early. A truly exceptional Long-billed Dowitcher was between migrations at N. Beach, *Calvert*, July 6 (JLS). Three Red-necked and one Wilson's phalaropes were at Hart June 6 (EJS), and one Wilson's had returned July 17 (EB).

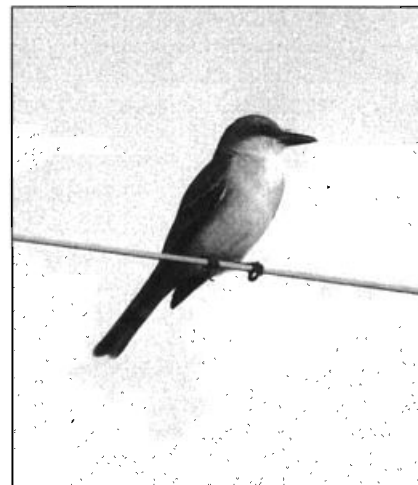
GULLS TO WOODPECKERS

The summer concentration of non-breeding gulls (mostly first-summer Herring and Great Black-backed) at Hart is unique in

the Region and usually produces something more unusual (there are summer records of Iceland, Thayer's, Glaucous, Little, Franklin's, and California). A first-summer Iceland Gull was at Hart June 6 (EJS), where Maryland's 2nd summer report came only last year. Lesser Black-backed Gulls (mostly first-summer as well) are expected there, with a peak count of six July 17 (EJS). An alarming expansion were the several Great Black-backed Gull nests with young on Skimmer I. June 28 (DC, MAT). Skimmer I. hosts Maryland's only Royal Tern colony, as well as Black Skimmers and hundreds of Common Terns. The gulls' presence there can only spell disaster for the terns.

Eight Gull-billed Terns were at E. A. Vaughn W.M.A. July 12 (GMJ, JLS, RL). There was no evidence of Sandwich Terns nesting on Skimmer I. this summer, but two were there June 17 (SHD) and one was there July 29 (HTA). Dyke estimated 430 pairs of Royal Terns on Skimmer I. June 17. For the past 2 summers, Least Terns have been found sporadically foraging at a large inland pond at P.W.R.C. North Tract, *Anne Arundel*. This year the species was found on 5 dates (v.o.), with a maximum of four July 10 (TB). There are no known colonies closer than 20 mi away, and the birds' continued presence here strongly suggests an inland colony somewhere nearby, indubitably on a flat topped gravel roof. Least Terns nest several miles inland in *Harford* and *Queen Anne's* and regularly commute to feeding areas from there. There were only 2 reports of Black Terns: one at the mouth of the Choptank R., *Talbot*, July 15 (JLS) and one at The Wildfowl Trust, *Queen Anne's*, July 26 (JB). Ten Black Skimmer nests on Skimmer I. was an unusually low number there.

There are usually at least a few Black-billed Cuckoo reports from the Piedmont, but this year one at L. Elkhorn, *Howard*, June 12 (DE) was the only one. Although Chuck-will's-widows are fairly common on the Coastal Plain in appropriate habitat, their nests are only very rarely found. Reese discovered 2 nests near Neavitt, *Talbot*, June 23 with one egg in one and two in the other. A Red-headed Woodpecker was at P.W.R.C. North Tract July 2 (SA), though nesting is unknown in *Anne Arundel*. Red-cockaded Woodpeckers in the Region have been reduced to a single colony which appears healthy but has little hope of expansion, as there is no corridor connecting other appropriate habitat. Thirteen individuals remain at this undisclosed colony in S. Virginia (*fide* DS).



This Gray Kingbird at Dameron, St. Mary's County in Maryland on June 20, 1998 documented the state's fourth. Photograph/Patty Craig

FLYCATCHERS TO ORIOLES

Late migrant Least Flycatchers included one at Metz. Rd., *Cecil*, through June 6 (LF) and one at L. Elkhorn June 8–9 (DE). A molting ad. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher at Ferry Landing, *Calvert*, July 18 (JLS, RL) was record-early by almost a week. A Willow Flycatcher singing at Sands Rd., *Anne Arundel*, June 7–15 (KL) was evidence of continued range expansion into the Coastal Plain. Craig found Maryland's fourth **Gray Kingbird** at her Dameron, *Saint Mary's*, home June 20 (p.a. ph. PC, ph. MC, AB, JKO, BBo) and was able to summon other birders to enjoy the bird before dusk. Maryland's first came from Girdletree, *Worcester*, on a similar date, June 14, 1975.

A Swainson's Thrush banded at P.R.N.A.S. June 18 (PC et al.) was much later than the previous late date of June 9, but was still presumed a spring migrant. A Warbling Vireo at Denton, *Caroline*, June 10 (MN) was unusual. The species may occur in very low densities on Maryland's Upper Eastern Shore, evidenced by several reports during Maryland's Atlas work, but there have been no known sites since 1987.

Early June saw almost no flight of late migrant warblers, contrasting sharply with last season, which had a good early June fallout. All late migrants are listed below. Perhaps most notable is that no Am. Redstarts were seen away from breeding areas in early June. This species consistently moves late. A late-migrant Chestnut-sided Warbler was at Dameron June 7 (PC), two late Magnolia Warblers were at Metz Rd. June 6 (LF), and two Black-throated Green Warblers were at Chino Farms, *Queen*

Warbler was at Dameron June 7 (PC), two late Magnolia Warblers were at Metz Rd. June 6 (LF), and two Black-throated Green Warblers were at Chino Farms, *Queen Anne's*, the same day (JG), while three were at P.L.S.P. June 4 (PC). Blackpoll Warblers are usually our latest migrant and rarely pass through up to a month after most other species have stopped migrating. One singing in Arlington, VA, July 1 (CS) was very late. A Black-and-white Warbler in an Arlington backyard June 27 (CKF) may have been evidence of some movement, since it should not nest nearby. Late passage is the norm with Mourning Warblers, and one was Rockburn Branch Park, *Howard*, June 5-7 (EN).

A male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at a *Howard* feeder July 17-19 (JC) was out of place, though the species has bred on rare occasion in the Piedmont away from the mountains. Dickcissels have recently been consistent at locations in *Carroll* and *Frederick* in early June and were found again this year through late June and early July (v.o.). Whether these birds ever breed successfully before their fields are mowed is unknown. Others were at Triadelphia Mill Rd., *Montgomery*, June 1 (RS); Friendship, *Anne Arundel* (where one was seen 2 years ago), July 7 (JLS); and at least two were at Hibler Rd., *Loudoun*, VA, during June (HE, JP, AM). None was reported from Maryland's Eastern Shore, where a small population is undoubtedly annual.

Vesper Sparrows are very rare breeders on the Western Shore in both the Coastal Plain and the e. Piedmont and there are currently no known breeding locations. One singing near Upper Marlboro in early June (RL, DG) raised the intriguing possibility of breeding. A Savannah Sparrow at Oatland Mills Rd., *Loudoun*, VA, July 29 (GM) was enigmatic. Though Virginia has very few breeding records in the Piedmont, the species breeds regularly in Maryland just to the north. On this late date, though, a Savannah Sparrow there could have dispersed from nesting areas just north. Even rarer was a Henslow's Sparrow, heard singing there June 14 (DBy), June 15 (JLS), and July 3 (GM), but never seen. All but extirpated from the Region outside the mountains, the only locations where the species persists are relict populations in the s. Virginia Piedmont and Saxis Marsh, *Accomack*, VA. Although there are several previous records of White-throated Sparrows lingering into the summer months, the 3 reports this year were extremely unusual. Two were at P.L.S.P., *Saint Mary's*,

June 4 (PC), one lingered in Bowie, *Prince George's*, June 8 to July 15 (FWF), and another was in an Arlington, VA, yard June 21 (CKF). An interesting behavioral note was the Orchard Oriole observed in Glendale, *Prince George's*, July 28 (TB) feeding on Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*) nectar by piercing the bases of the flowers.

ADDENDA

The following was inadvertently omitted from AFN 51(5):982: Two Little Blue Heron nests found among the heronry on Little Bodkin I., *Queen Anne's*, July 31, 1997 (ph. MJI, ph. JLS), furnished a first nest record for the county.

Observers (area compilers in boldface):

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