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in cooperation with
few York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology
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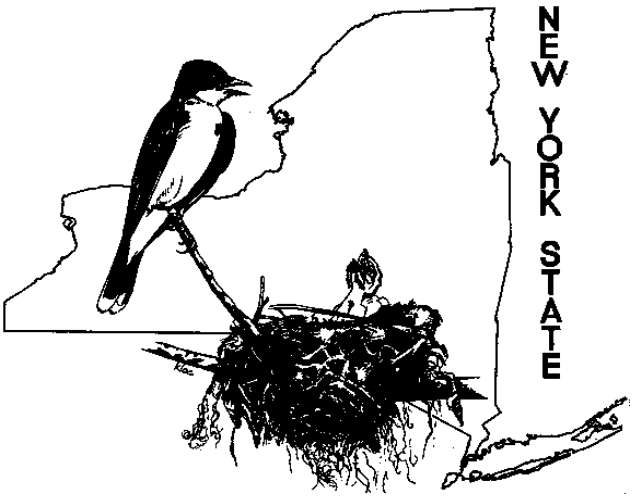
New York State Museum



BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 9 **SEPTEMBER 1983**

From Stake-Drivers to Green-Backs: An Atlas Guide to Wading Birds of Long Island

Not too long ago atlasing for wading birds on Long Island would have been a simple affair. Prior to *1938* the only waders to be found along the barrier beach were the Green-backed Heron and Black-crowned Night-Heron. This has all changed. The list of Long Island waders has increased dramatically due to southern population increases and the northern range expansion of a number of species. It is believed that the decline of the millinery trade and legal protection of these species contributed to these increases. With the nesting of the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in *1938* began a period of species additions which includes the Snowy Egret *(1949),* Great Egret *(1953),* Louisiana Heron *(1955),* Little Blue Heron *(1958),* Glossy Ibis *(1961),* and Cattle Egret *(1972).* Interestingly, one of New York State's most widely distributed herons, the Great Blue Heron, rarely breeds in this area.

For the last two seasons, the Laboratory of Ornithology's Seatuck Research Program has been censusing and atlasing wading birds on the barrier beach which stretches from Fire Island Inlet to Jones Inlet. On this stretch of sand, which separates the South Oyster Bay from the Atlantic, are some of the highest concentrations of wading birds in New York State.

Atlasing these species has both its easy and difficult sides. Since many of the colonies are located on marsh islands or dredge spoil islands, a boat is required to get to them. Murphy's Law was developed with boats in mind. Colonies which are located near roadways are, of course, easier to reach.

Selecting the areas to investigate is much easier. Most of the species discussed so far nest in well defined shrubland thickets which are easy to locate on the flatness of the barrier beach. Active rookeries can frequently be identified by the white egrets (Snowy, Cattle, Great) which roost in the taller portions of the thicket and are contrasted against the green vegetation.

Because these birds are colonial nesters, the potential for confirming a number of species in a single visit is quite good. Colonies in this area range from two to eight species, with the Black-crowned Night-Heron, Snowy Egret, Glossy Ibis and Great Egret generally contributing the greatest number of individuals to the larger colonies. The Green-backed Heron, Louisiana Heron, Little Blue Heron and Yellow-crowned NightHeron are usually represented by smaller numbers, thus making them more difficult to confirm.

There are still obstacles in confirming these species, not the least of which are the dense growths of poison ivy associated with many thickets and the stench of guano baking in the noonday sun. But more importantly the welfare of the colony should always be paramount. The primary consideration at this point is to minimize the disturbance to the colony. Sensitivity to disturbance varies during the different stages of the breeding cycle. Birds may abandon a site if it is disturbed during the period of courtship, nest building, or egg laying. Disturbing a colony when eggs or young chicks are in the nests exposes them to inclement weather and predation by gulls and crows. In addition young may scramble out of the nest if disturbed and become lost. The optimum time to try to confirm breeding is the period just prior to fledging. For most species this period runs from mid-June to early July. At this time the young are large enough to be seen at a distance and are distinctive enough so that in many cases they can be separated by species. Most species can be confirmed without actually entering the colony.

cont. p 2

From Stake-Drivers, cont. from p 1

If it is necessary to enter a colony the visit should be as brief as possible. It is a good idea to keep an observer outside of the colony to observe which species are flushed up. Since colonies are usually in the middle of a dense tangle it can be difficult for the atlaser in the colony to spot the one Yellow-crowned Night-Heron that is flushed amongst the dense vegetation. From inside the colony it is possible to separate a number of the species by where they nest. Great Egrets nest high up in bushes and trees while Snowy Egret nests can be found lower in the vegetation. NightHeron nests usually are built in the inner branches of the trees and bushes, and Glossy Ibis nests are on or near the ground. With these points in mind, atlasing these longlegged waders can be a challenging experience in one of New York State's most unique and dynamic environments, the islands, salt marshes and estuaries of Long Island's coast.

Thomas S. Litwin and David Peterson
Seatuck Research Station

Distraction Display in Northern Waterthrush

On the morning of June *2, 1983 I* was atlasing in block 6066D near East Taghkanic in Columbia County. The call of a Red-bellied Woodpecker lured me into a hardwood swamp where at least two Northern Waterthrushes could be heard singing. As I sloshed past the upturned roots of a blown-down tree, a female Northern Waterthrush jumped from her nest.

The nearby male sang and bobbed his tail in typical waterthrush fashion but the behavior of the female was remarkable. She arched her back and lowered her head and tail forming a very symmetrical convex curve with her body. She scampered mouse-like for short distances along a horizontal branch about a foot above the grassy hummocks.

This hump-backed behavior itself was fascinating but at the end of the branch it was followed by another display. She lifted her wings high over her shoulders and fluttered them in a manner that gave the illusion that she could not fly. Her show of helplessness continued as she rolled sideways off the branch but she quickly regained a perch by flitting to a nearby branch in close proximity to the male.

Vivian Mills Pitzrick describes Hooded Warblers "feigning injury" in the May *1983* Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter, but I was quite unprepared for such a performance from a warbler at the time of the sighting.

Bill Cook, Region *8*

Green sheets are due in to your regional coordinator by **September 15th**. Please make a big effort to get them on time.

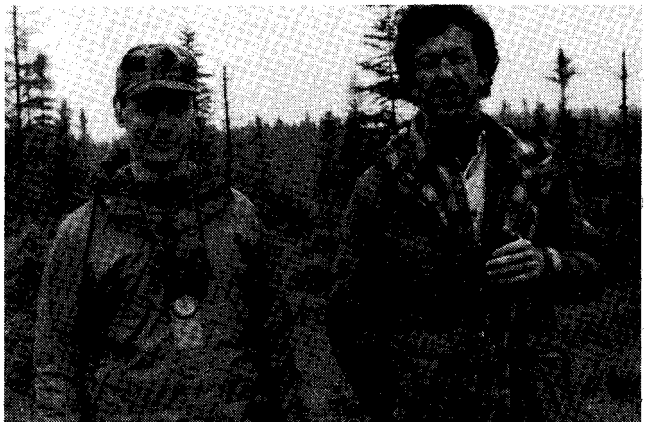
In a Remote Bog . . .

One of the most exciting quests of the Atlas led to a new confirmed breeding species for New York State this past summer in Adirondack-Champlain Region *7.* It was the fourth since field work began in *1980.* Added to Forster's Tern, Blue Grosbeak, and Boat-tailed Grackle-all found in Marine Region 10-was Palm Warbler.

On the morning of June *23, Tim* Stiles of Brooklyn (a Region 10 birder, of course) had bushwacked through a dense stand of alder to the edge of a large bog in western Franklin County. Walking on the sphagnum mat among closely spaced spruces and tamaracks, he heard an unfamiliar trill and shortly located a pair of "Yellow" Palm Warblers *(Dendroica* palmarum hypochrysea), the eastern subspecies, never before recorded in the state in summer.

Stiles returned to the bog on July 6 with Dan Nickerson of Maine, who had found the first nest of Wilson's Warbler in NYS in *1978,* and regional coordinator Mike Peterson, who in *1975* had located the first White-winged Crossbill nest for the state. Altogether, it took the three bog-sloggers less than an hour to relocate the singing male, to note his mate gathering nesting materials, and to discover the first New York nest of Palm Warbler: a still-empty cup of grasses carefully concealed under vegetation on the sphagnum, lined with a few feathers. According to Atlas criteria, the record was still Probable (PR-B). Nearby they also found a Hermit Thrush nest containing four eggs, then continued on to confirm Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Gray Jay, and Boreal Chickadee around the same spruce-tamarack bog. .

D.p. *hypochrysea breeds* from Ontario, central and southern Quebec, and Newfoundland south to New Hampshire (Center Ossipee), northern and eastern Maine, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and now New York's Adirondacks. After waiting two days until July 8, Tim Stiles returned to find the nest cup completely feather-lined and containing a single egg: CO-NE!



Tim Stiles (L) and Dan Nickerson (r.) on the bog where the nest of the Yellow Palm Warbler was discovered, July 6, 1983. Both Savannah and Lincoln's Sparrows breed here, while Gray Jays and Boreal Chickadees were Confirmed nearby.

Who Is Janet? What Is She?

Janet in her Catskill block. **Photo by Mary Ten Eyck**

She's Janet Carroll, our Coordinator of the Atlas Project, who keeps everything running smoothly. She's the person we couldn't do without.

Where did she come from? It was her good fortune to grow up in a small town, Lowden, Iowa-population 600. Wanderlust was in her blood and when high school was over she scampered off to the big city, San Francisco. That spectacular city on the great bay stole her heart as she reveled in the plays, music, night clubs, museums and the strange and interesting people-but still no birds. The itch to move persisted and she went off to the other big city, New York, for a brief stint. However, the call of rural life was strong and soon she was living again a quiet, small-town life in Vermont. Here hiking, skiing, gardening and an introduction to birding kept her busy.

It wasn't long before she was "hooked" on birding. She improved her knowledge and skill by taking an identification course at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science in Woodstock. Janet calls herself a "passive birder" because she prefers to spend hours in a swamp or marsh just watching. But this hasn't kept her from birding at Assateague, Cape May, Hawk Mountain, Brigantine NWR, the Maine coast, and the wonderful Massachusetts birding spots of Plum Island, Rockport and Gloucester. And she birds when she's home in Iowa.

As she became a birder her curiosity about the world of nature was so aroused that she decided to earn a degree in biology at Castleton State College (Vermont). While in college she worked two summers for Cornell's Peregrine Fund hacking peregrines at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Brigantine NWR, and the Mohonk Preserve (New Paltz, N.Y.). These summers of association with peregrines taught her much about bird behavior and gave her a great admiration for the magnificent birds. It's easy to understand why her favorite bird is the Peregrine Falcon. Probably with tongue a bit in her cheek, she says another favorite is the American Crow because "when nothing else is flying, it is."

Her next work, with funding from The Mohonk Preserve and DEC was looking for Great Horned Owls around two peregrine hack sites. The fine work she did with DEC convinced them she was the right person to be coordinator for the Atlas Project, an opinion with which all of us who work with her concur.

If anyone should have the idea that the Atlas Coordinator doesn't have much to do, be disabused of that naive notion. Janet's days are filled with bugging folks to get their green sheets in on time, editing and analyzing the mass of data gathered by more than 1200 surveyors, working with Regional Coordinators on their problems, supervising the computer tabulation and mapping of the data, directing the activity of DECfunded blockbusting teams, co-editing (with Mike Peterson) the Atlas Newsletter, reporting to and advising the Atlas Project Steering Committee, and constantly trouble-shooting here, there and everywhere. All this she does with humor and good sense. She works easily with all of us and has earned our support and respect.

Janet is not just an in-the-office worker because she's out in the field helping to atlas whenever she can help fill a need. Doing this she's worked in over 30 blocks which has given her some "neat" experiencesseeing a GBHEronry, a BDOW-CO-FY, a BRCR-COON, a Raven eyrie, a coyote, a brood of TURKS, and meeting some very nice people.

She works a block in the Catskills which has produced 80 species, including GCTH, YBFL and BPWA. Her favorite block is the one near her home at Selkirk where the marsh, swamp, woodlots, old farms and fields, and the Hudson River have yielded 84 species with 47 Coed.

Janet, this exciting operation would stumble and bumble without you. Our warmest thanks and affection.

Gordon M. Meade
Chairman, Atlas Project
For all of us in the Project

Marked Black-crowned Night-Herons

During 1983, immature Black-crowned Night-Herons were marked with numbered wing tags in southwest Lake Erie. This study is being done to determine their migrational routes and wintering areas. If you observe a wing-tagged heron please report the date, location, color of tag and if possible, the number to: Bird Banding Laboratory, Office of Migratory Bird Management, Laurel, Maryland 20811. All reports will be acknowledged.

Atlasing in Region Ten-- The Marine Region

Region Ten which includes Long Island, New York City and the southern half of Westchester County is the smallest of the State's ten regions. Although it is inhabited by about twelve million people and much of its natural area has been destroyed, it still contains a variety of diverse habitats and some of the best birding areas in the State. No part of the region is more than a few hundred feet above sea level with the highest portions in Westchester arid along Long Island's glacial moraines. Among the natural habitats are rich deciduous woods, drier oak-pine woods, Pitch PineScrub Oak barrens, salt marshes, barrier beaches and dunelands, rivers, lakes, ponds and swamps. Bogs and fresh water marshes are rare as are natural grasslands.

Man-made or man-altered habitats include great expanses of farmlands on eastern Long Island, principally potato fields but also sod farms, horse farms and lately vineyards none of much use to breeding birds. Golf courses, airports and unused farms slated for subdivisions provide some grasslands. Several areas still contain large estates but housing subdivisions cover much of the western half of Long Island and Westchester. Urbanization increases with proximity to the steel and concrete metropolis but perhaps we can now think more kindly of the city that erected what must be among the world's most elaborate and expensive avian housing, the bridges that the peregrines found to their liking.

The small size of the region, the large number of resident birders and the excellent cooperation received from nearly all made it possible to obtain some coverage in 260 of the 281 blocks in the region by the end of 1982. An estimated 300 individuals have participated in the project and valuable support has been received from many of the local bird clubs including The Linnaean Society of New York and the Lyman Langdon, Huntington, Four Harbors, South Shore, Great South Bay, Moriches Bay, and North Fork Audubon Societies and the Baldwin Bird Club. A representative in each club has helped to arrange meetings, organize coverage and distribute supplies. Berna Weissman, Region Nine Coordinator, has capably organized coverage in southern Westchester and Bill and Norma Siebenheller have performed the same outstanding job on Staten Island. However, many observers are not affiliated with any club and participate as individuals.

All of the previously uncovered blocks were assigned for 1983 and it is hoped that some data will be available from every block at the end of this season. Quality of coverage varies with the number of years a block has been worked, the hours spent, the experience and dedication of the observer and factors such as habitat types and weather. Using the method described in American Birds, Volume 37, pages 7-13, coverage was rated good in 115 blocks, fair in 93 and nadequate in 51 blocks after the third year. Considerable improvement is expected in the ratings this year and the current goal is to obtain good coverage in all blocks now that the earlier goal of some coverage in all blocks seems assured.

Due to the irregular coastlines and the number of enclosed salt water bays, many blocks have only small land areas thus restricting habitat variety and number of species present. Furthermore, the large urbanized and suburbanized areas contain only a limited variety of habitats. Nevertheless, 90 or more species have been found in 5 blocks, 80 or more in 18 others and 70 or more in 35 additional blocks. Thus, 22% of the blocks have yielded at least 70 species. At the other extreme, tiny Great Gull Island which falls in two blocks, has 9 species on one half and 10 on the other, all confirmed, the only blocks by the way with 100% of the species both found and confirmed. These species lists can be matched for size by two blocks in Manhattan with 9 and 10 species respectively and few more expected.

Bull (1964, Birds of the New York Area) listed 190 species as having bred in the New York area but this included parts of New Jersey and Connecticut as well as Orange and Putnam Counties and all of Westchester, a considerably larger territory than Region Ten. Of the 229 species on the 1980 Atlas list, about 186 had bred in the Marine Region. Four more have since been confirmed, Forster's Tern, Black-hooded Parrakeet, Boattailed Grackle and Blue Grosbeak. By the end of the 1982 season, 185 species had been reported in the region with 162 confirmed. Obviously, some previously breeding species are no longer present. Species confirmed include 11 herons and ibises, 14 waterfowl, 6 hawks, 7 shorebirds, 9 gulls and terns, 5 owls, 5 woodpeckers, 6 flycatchers, 5 swallows, 8 mimids and thrushes, 4 vireos, 17 warblers, 8 blackbirds and 19 finches and sparrows.

Several species are very widespread in the region. Eight have been listed in over 90% of the blocks covered. These, in order of occurrence are: Song Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Starling, Robin, House Finch, Mourning Dove, Mockingbird and Common Grackle. The order of species confirmed is somewhat different but the top eight which were confirmed in over 70% of the blocks covered includes many of the same species: Robin, Starling, Red-winged Blackbird, House Sparrow, Common Grackle, House Finch, Mourning Dove and Mockingbird. At the other end of the scale, 14 species have been listed in only one block and 11 confirmed in single blocks.

Each season has had its highlights. Despite the late and frantic start in 1980, over one-third of the blocks in the region were covered with 164 species reported and 138 confirmed. These included the first known Long Island nesting of the Hooded Merganser.

By the end of 1981, 75% of the blocks had some coverage and the list had grown to 174 species with 149 confirmed. First state breeding records were obtained for the Forster's Tern and Boat-

After 1982, 92% of the blocks had been worked. Memorable confirmations were the state's first breeding Blue Grosbeak on Staten Island and Long Island's first breeding Cerulean Warblers. Also significant were downstate's second known Pine Siskin nest and confirmed Red Crossbills on Long Island.

Although 1983 results have not yet been reported, it is certain that nothing will top the New York City peregrines. In addition, the Black Rail has been upgraded from PO to PR in its only known New York State breeding location.

Much remains to be done. Several possible species have yet to be reported and confirmations should be obtained for at least a few more of the possibles and probables. Many blocks have expected species missing from their list and nearly all blocks could still add confirmations. Experience to date indicates that the enthusiasm and dedication of the first four years will continue and help bring the Atlas effort in Region Ten to a successful conclusion.

Gilbert S. Raynor

Nesting Boxes for Cavity Nesting Ducks

A few years ago, I initiated a small project of constructing and setting out nest boxes for ducks. As well as providing local cavity nesting ducks with nesting sites, it has been an invaluable way of confirming these ducks for the atlas project. I would encourage others to start a similar project where appropriate habitat is available. It makes it easier to atlas for cavity nesting ducks and also provides nesting sites that may be in short supply. Even a modest nest box program (ten boxes) can increase the breeding population of an area. High occupancy rates indicate that available sites are in short supply.

This past year, nine out of ten of my nesting boxes were used. I was able to attract Hooded Mergansers, Wood Ducks and Common Goldeneye. An Eastern Screech-Owl also roosted in one of the boxes. I have gained much insight and enjoyment over the last two years with this project.

Mark Gretch, Region 7

Gil Raynor Region 10 Coordinator

Gilbert Raynor cannot remember when he was not deeply interested in nature but his keen interest in birds was sparked as a young boy by the gift of a Chester Reed Field Guide. Early forays in search of nests provided excellent training for the Atlas project many years later. He obtained a bird banding permit as soon as he reached the required age and has been banding for over 45 years mostly at home with traps and nets but also colonial species. While still in high school, he spent hours at night in a blind watching several Whippoorwill nests. An article on these observations was published in Bird-Banding in 1941. His primary interest is the birds of Long Island where he has resided all his life. His Long Island list totals over 350 species and trips to several parts of the country have brought his North American list to nearly 600. He is a member of the American Ornithologists' Union, the Wilson Ornithological Society, the Eastern and Northeastern Bird Banding Associations, the American Society of Mammalogists, the Linnaean Society of New York and, of course, the Federation.

Professionally, he is a Meteorologist and Associate Head of the Atmospheric Science Division at Brookhaven National Laboratory. He received his early training in meteorology in the U.S. Navy during World War Two and joined the staff of the Laboratory in 1952. His research interests include micrometerology, coastal meteorology, long-range atmospheric transport of air pollutants and precipitation chemistry. He is a member of the American Meteorological Society and has published numerous papers in scientific and professional journals.

In 1953, he started the Central Suffolk County Christmas Count which he has led ever since and in 1975 initiated a breeding bird census in June in the same circle. He has taken two U.S. Fish and Wildlife breeding bird surveys annually since 1967 and has helped cover two plots for .National Audubon's breeding bird census program since 1977. These various studies have led to a number of papers in ornithological journals.

He is a Director and Past President of Moriches Bay Audubon Society, a past Trustee of the Long Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy and a member of its Mashomack Preserve Scientific Advisory Committee. He also serves as a member of the Riverhead Town Conservation Advisory Council, is Chairman of the West Manor School Board and Treasurer and Sunday School Superintendent of the Manorville Bible Protestant Church. He enjoys camping, hiking, fishing, nature photography, and wood working. In his spare time, he works on the Atlas project.

Roseate Terns: Distribution, Identification, Ecology

There are 39 species of terns on this watery planet. Many of them are superbly beautiful, but I think none quite matches the Roseate for sheer grace of form and motion. This most elegant bird of a notoriously handsome group has a widely distributed but scattered breeding range on the world's marine coasts, primarily in the North Atlantic and Indian Oceans and throughout southeast Asia. In northeastern North America, Massachusetts and the Long Island area are the main breeding grounds. Unlike some of our other terns, Roseates are not found inland or along the St. Lawrence or Great Lakes.

In America, the Roseate has been on a population rollercoaster during much of this century and last, and was recently designated as endangered in New York State. During the late 1800s, egging and plume hunting took a heavy toll of terns in eastern North America, and by 1890 Roseates had bottomed out at about 2,000 pairs. Yet they increased after protection at the turn of the century, reaching perhaps 8,500 pairs in the 1930s. In the 40s the species began a long decline due to loss of habitat, occupation of breeding areas by gulls (which were expanding) and predation, especially by rats in some areas. From the early to late 1970s Roseate Terns may have declined as much as 50% (back to 1880s levels) due to the continued effects of these same factors plus hunting on their South American wintering quarters. At the annual meeting of the Colonial Waterbird Group last November, a cautiously optimistic consensus of scientists working with this species was that in the last few years the downward trend seems to have paused, with numbers remaining fairly steady.

This species nests regularly in only a handful of Long Island sites, but they may turn up anywhere Common Terns are breeding. Identification of Roseates can be tricky, because the bird changes in appearance as the season progresses. Roseates look most like Roseates early in the season when they are beginning to choose mates. At the time they are newly arrived in late April and early May, the bill appears all black, the breast sports a rosy bloom in good light, the tail is proportionally longer and wings shorter than a Common Tern's (the bird they most resemble) and the plumage appears luminously, pearly white, especially when the sun is at a sharp angle. After eggs are laid, the bill reddens from the base, the rosy breast pales to a light apricot which is difficult to see (unless you have the bird in your hand), and the longest tail feathers may be molted. You can still look for that pearly white, and the raspy voice can be picked out from a swirling chorus of perturbed terns, but in general the bird begins to look more like a Common Tern.

As an aside for evolution fans, the most probable reason why Roseates look most like Roseates when they are pairing is a phenomenon which we evolutionary ecologists call "character displacement." This entails the maximizing of species differences at a time or place where two closely related species meet and choose mates. Theoretically, character displacement evolves when hybridization is possible (I and others have, rarely, found Roseate/Common hybrids) but where hybrid young face reduced viability at some stage of life. Natural selection, which in a sense has offspring viability as the bottom line, will then favor birds that give the most unambiguous signals of their species identity and that tend to choose similarly unambiguous-looking mates. Birds which choose or are chosen by mates of the wrong species will produce few viable young and, in an evolutionary sense, select against themselves and against the continued existence of their genes. In this way, the species-typical characters diverge over evolutionary time. This divergence need be manifest only at breeding to serve its purpose, as in the Roseates and Commons.

Unlike most terns, Roseates place their nest in a sheltered spot such as under a goldenrod bush or a piece of loose driftwood. The clutch is usually two eggs, which are more pointed and finely speckled than a Common's. Roseate chicks have black legs and feet, and their down has a matty, hairy look. Roseates may nest a bit less synchronously than Commons, with a fair percentage of nests being established past the peak of the Common's laying period. When visiting terneries, try to avoid entering nesting areas, especially early in the season (before May's end), because minimizing disturbance is the best policy.

As part of my doctoral study on the feeding and breeding of terns I have noticed a substantial difference in the foraging behavior of Roseates and Commons, the Roseate being more narrowly specialized. Where I've studied them, Roseates appear to forage almost exclusively close inshore in the ocean or at the mouth of an ocean inlet and feed along physical features such as tide rips and shallow bars. They appear not to follow predatory fish schools. Commons may fish wherever Roseates do, but also feed in the bays, in fresh water, and far offshore where they rely heavily on schools of bluefish, bonito, and other predators to force small fish to the surface. If these observations prove correct, Roseates may have far less actual feeding habitat, which may be an important part of the reason why they are much less numerous than Commons.

Carl Safina
National Audubon Society

Hints on Haunts

A new reference piece entitled Hints on Haunts giving habitat information on selected species has been compiled by Mike Peterson, Region 7 Coordinator and)ay Lehman, Region 4 Coordinator with help from Gil Raynor, Region 10 Coordinator. Hints on Haunts is available from your regional coordinator.

Black Ducks Given Further Support

A gradual decline in Black Duck populations has prompted a new management effort by states in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Black Ducks are residents of eastern North America, nesting mainly in the wetlands of forested and coastal areas. Each year they migrate south to coastal wintering areas in the Atlantic Flyway and open water areas of the Mississippi Flyway. It has been in the wintering areas that federal and state waterfowl biologists have noticed a reduction in the numbers of Black Ducks.

Winter waterfowl surveys during the past twenty years have clearly indicated a gradual declining population. For example, in the early 1960s the annual surveys found about 450,000 Black Ducks-a decrease of approximately 250,000 from the previous decade. The winter counts this year, at just under 300,000 birds, further reflect a continuing population decline. Winter counts are believed to represent about 20 percent of the cu'rrent Black Duck population.

Reasons for the decline are not yet clearly established. However, habitat changes appear to be a major factor. Wetland drainage and filling coastal marshes for residential or industrial construction, have destroyed many acres of prime habitat.

In addition, pollutants have degraded habitat, particularly the fragile estuaries along the coast.

During 1976-80 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State wildlife agencies conducted an intensive banding program. Hunting regulations were held constant during that period so that the effects of hunting on Black Ducks might be examined. The results of the study did not show a clear relationship between harvest rates and annual survival, but the relatively high harvest rates indicate that hunting, along with other factors, may be contributing to population decline.

Competition with the Mallard, a close relative of the Black Duck, may also be part of the overall problem. Mallards are now found in areas once exclusively occupied by Black Ducks, and the two species do successfully interbreed.

The difficulty facing wildlife biologists now is what can be done to help the Black Duck? In addressing this question, the Atlantic Waterfowl Council has prepared a management plan to guide future efforts. An immediate objective is to stabilize Black Duck populations. Recommended harvest reductions are aimed at stopping the population decline. Long-term objectives involve protection of habitat and wetland improvement effo rts.

New York State, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other flyway states, is working to further reduce the Black Duck harvest. Since 1967, hunters in the Atlantic Flyway have not been permitted to shoot more than two Black Ducks per day and many states-upstate New York included-have dropped the bag limit to only one per day in a total bag of five ducks. This year New York expects further changes in the Black Duck bag limit.

The final migratory waterfowl hunting seasons for 1983-84 will be released by the federal government in late summer. The department will issue a statewide news release as, part of its public information effort. DEC will also publish the regulations in the 1983-84 New York Waterfowl Hunting Regulations Guide available from license-issuing agents in mid-September.

Waterfowl hunters will be encouraged to carefully identify Black Ducks and Mallards in flight because the two species are often found together and look quite similar. The Mallard drake does have a distinctive green head, but other differences between the species are more subtle. The Mallard hen has a light colored breast, light tail feathers and distinct white borders on the upper and lower edges of the blue wing patch. Whereas, Black Duck drakes and hens are nearly identical, both are uniformly very dark except for the contrasting light underwing. Since low light situations make identification of these species difficult, hunters are asked to make a special effort to improve recognition skills before hunting. Black Duck identification brochures will be available to sportsmen at the time that the waterfowl hunting regulations guides are issued. In addition, the Department's Hunter Training Program offers excellent waterfowl identification courses.

Improving the future for the Black Duck will be a long term and difficult task. The harvest reductions in itiated this year provide hope, not certainty, that the Black Duck population decline may be stopped. If suc-cessful, perhaps there will be good reason to believe that long term approaches also may be successful in dealing with all factors presently clouding the Black Duck's future.

Steve Clarke
N.Y.S. Dept. of Environmental Conservation

Peregrines' Progress

It has been a big year for peregrines in New York State with confirmed breeding recorded for the first time in nearly twenty years. Two pairs of peregrines nested on the Throgs Neck and Verrazano Narrows Bridges in New York City. Each pair laid three eggs, but only one chick survived the rigors of the Throgs Neck bridge. The three Verrazano birds, however, were last seen flying on foraging expeditions with their parents.

A total of 21 peregrines were released at three hack sites in the Adirondacks this summer. Three observations of peregrines were made by Atlas workers early in the summer and sub-adult birds showed up at two of the sites. This bodes well for an Adirondack nesting in the near future. Those of you working in the Adirondacks keep your eyes open next spring for peregrines and report any sightings immediately to the Endangered Species Unit, NYSDEC, Wildlife Resources Center, Delmar 12054-(518) 439-7635.

Sora Confirmation

On the morning of May 19, 1983, I was atlasing in block 6165C near Ancramdale in Columbia County. A large marsh called Drowned Lands Swamp in this block seemed to be a good place to play rail recordings. Following Mike Peterson's suggestion in the Breeding Bird Atlas Newsletter, Number 8, May 1983, I had been playing the tape at every congregation of cattails that I had encountered. A week before, a Virginia Rail had responded to the tape in Hudson's South Bay providing my first experience with successfully atlasing a rail. So after a week of no responses I was delighted once again to hear two Virginia Rails and watch one of them sneak through the cattails at my feet.

The next recording on the tape was Sora. It had never drawn a response yet, despite daily attempts, so I was almost shocked to actually hear a Sora call back. Now having never seen a Sora I thought that this might be an opportunity to add this bird to my life list. Unlike the Virginia Rails, the Sora would not approach me so I walked around the marsh to get closer to the bird.

Responses to the tape indicated that the bird was very near but moving away. The vegetation was very low and sparse at this season so I thought I could get a glimpse of the bird as it moved from one bunch of cattails to another. Its moving away frustrated me because I could get no closer on dry land.

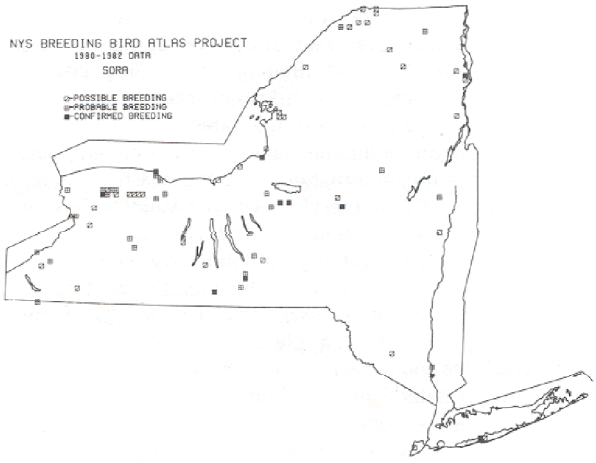
I reached down to touch the water and found that it was very cold indeed. The question was whether or not to take off my shoes and socks. I decided that in order to continue birding the rest of the day in comfort, I would want dry shoes. So off they came. The water was actually painfully cold so I sought out mounds or stumps that allowed me to be mostly out of the water. I moved along the edge of the marsh desperately trying to get closer to the bird. After several attempts to get closer, pausing, playing the tape, waiting, the bird remained skillfully out of sight. To add to my frustration a second Sora began responding to the tape from behind me.

In the midst of this disappointment, my feet numb after 45 minutes exposure, I caught a glimpse of a dark chicken-like spot perhaps 100 feet out into the marsh. With the tape recorder lodged between my knees I brought up my binoculars and nearly lost my breath at my first sighting of a Sora.

Fearing that it would soon vanish, I stared intently. But as the shock waves dissipated, I realized that the bird was settling into a nest! The nest was composed of dried cattails mounded up just a few inches above the water level. I watched while the bird made a trip off the nest and returned. She appeared to swim duck-like with her body floating high on the water's surface, although she may have actually been walking in keel deep water.

This breeding confirmation and life bird combination has been my most exciting atlas event so far. Occurring near the 100th hour of my atlas work for 1983, it provides a memorable milestone.

Bill Cook
Region 8



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