

# The Changing Seasons: Business as usual

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During the second-largest flight of Aztec Thrushes recorded in the United States, this bird was one of three seen at Madera Canyon, Arizona 27 July 2006, and nine had been counted here the day before. *Photograph by John Puschock.*

When colleagues and friends return from their Alaskan travels in late June, I relish hearing the tales of birding and socializing, of encounters with big mammals, of heavy low-pressure systems that bring bounties of Siberian birds. In recent years, weather tales have been less than legendary: warmer weather has been the norm, with few big lows moving over from Asia, open seas with little ice, and record-early arrival by nesting species. The signs of global warm-up have seemed to strengthen each spring, at least over the past six years.

This year, however, the story was different: a cool, windy, even snowy June, with below-average temperatures that persisted well through the last part of July and rather late arrivals by shorebirds and waterbirds. Nome's June was its coolest in 21 years, surely influenced both by snow pack and by the deep pack ice in the Bering Sea that extended well to the south of even long-term averages. Much of Canada also experienced a "moderate"

summer, particularly after the intense heat of summer 2005. The Northwest Territories and Yukon Territories had a short warming trend in June but otherwise a cool or average summer, whereas British Columbia was cool through much of June, like Alaska, but experienced a warm July, and Québec had temperatures that were up 2-3° F or more from long-term averages, higher in the Ungava Peninsula. Climatologists tell us to expect "off" periods during the overall warming trend, and summer 2006 may well have been such a cooler period, at least for northern areas.

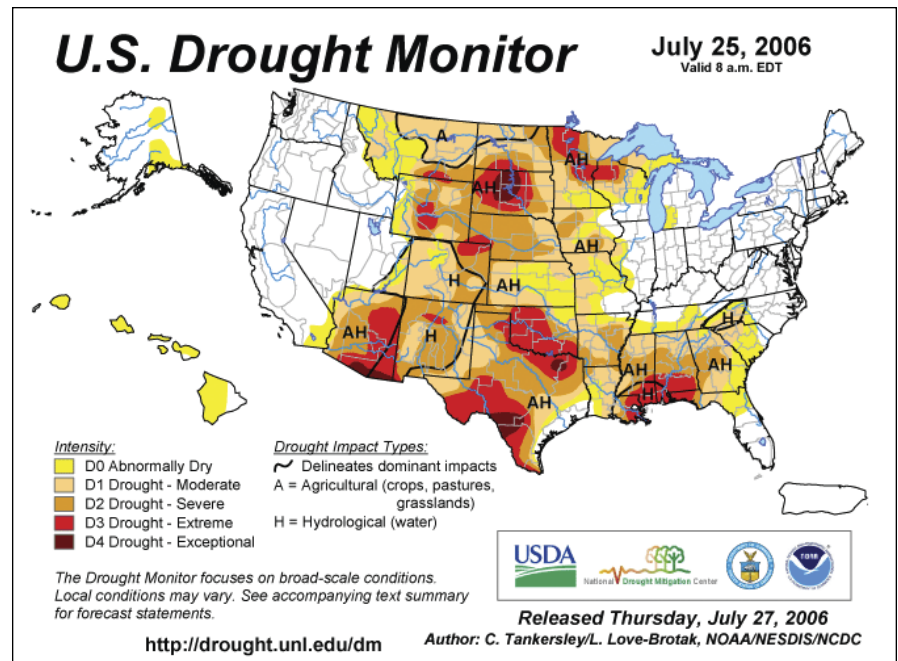
June was also cooler than normal across much of the East, but July was downright hot—the sixth warmest on record in Boston since 1872—and markedly warmer than usual along the Atlantic coast south through the District of Columbia. Most of the Midwest (particularly Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa, Kentucky) was warmer than normal by July, but the Southeast reported "average" conditions all around. West of the Mississippi Riv-

er in the Lower 48, however, most regions baked. The Great Plains recorded temperatures as high as 115° F from Texas to central North Dakota, and South Dakota tied its highest temperature ever on July 15, with 120° F at Usta. In Glasgow, Montana, July ran almost 10° F above average. The Rockies and remainder of the West were similarly scorched: Denver hit 100° F on June 14, ten days earlier than the previous record, and July was the second warmest on record in Idaho and western Montana. Temperatures were well above average in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, southern California, and Nevada, in many cases breaking records; temperatures in Oregon and Washington were among the top ten percent in 112 years of records.

Although high temperatures must have had a negative effect on nesting success over large areas, regional editors singled out summer precipitation—either excesses or deficits—as having more profound (or at least more obvious) impact on nesters this season.

The record warmth through the West abetted drought conditions over large areas, while the East experienced wet weather in June, as it had in May. Boston had its third wettest June (313% above normal), and the season was one of the wettest on record in New York and New Jersey as well; New York City had 37 cm of rain in the two-month period. It was the wettest June on record in parts of Virginia, largely thanks to a coastal storm in the last week of the month that brought 36 cm of rain. In the New England and Hudson-Delaware regions, too much rain meant flooded-out loon nests, bluebirds and tern chicks lost to hypothermia, low reproductive success in Ruffed Grouse, and young swallows and martins that perished because adults had such poor conditions for foraging. West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania also had plenty of rain, causing localized flooding, and impounded areas there were often too full of water to provide shorebirds with habitat.

Precipitation levels varied widely across the Midwest, as is usually true in this diverse area, but most regions reported moderately dry conditions and relatively high breeding success in most avian communities. On average, the season was driest in the Western Great Lakes region. Northern Indiana and Illinois had sufficient rain, but the southern reaches of those states had rainfall deficits of up to 25 cm for the season. Drier conditions created good habitat for migrating shorebirds in western Minnesota and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Iowa recorded its ninth driest June, and July was also very dry there, with severe drought in several corners of the state; the same was true of western Missouri. Tennessee and Kentucky reported relatively "normal" conditions through June, with Tennessee notably warmer and drier than usual in July. When conditions are nearer the norm, reproductive success in most species can be difficult to reckon, and "barometer" birds are hard to come by. (Least Terns, for instance, posted mixed results during the season: low water conditions on the Mississippi River made for good success, whereas rises on the Ohio River eliminated nesting habitat.) The Gulf Coast states experienced continued drought over large areas, which was broken only by rains in August; coastal Texas was an exception, and Houston logged almost 40 cm of rain for the period. In the Gulf of Mexico, the Chandeleur Islands off Louisiana remain mere vestiges after the devastation of Hurricane *Katrina*, but a few thousand pairs of terns managed to nest on North Island and North Breton Island. (Please do read the final Central Southern region's report, penned by Dan Purrington—who retires as a regional ed-



**Figure 1.** U.S. Drought Monitor for 25 July 2006. Note the persistent dry conditions throughout the continent's center, even after the arrival of monsoonal moisture in July, and the severe drought in areas of the central Gulf Coast damaged by recent hurricanes. Graphic courtesy of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association.

itor with this issue after almost four decades with the journal. Your colleagues, and your readers, thank you for your devotion to these pages, Dan.)

In the prairies and plains, from central Texas through central North Dakota, many areas suffered from yet another onslaught of drought. It was the third driest summer on record at Grand Forks, North Dakota, while some areas in Texas had no measurable precipitation. Only in the northernmost part of the Plains, in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, did good rains arrive in June, which improved habitat for some aquatic birds but proved to be too much for Western and Eared Grebes and Franklin's Gulls, which were displaced by high water in some corners. By contrast, across Nebraska and much of the central Plains, severe drought eliminated habitat for species such as Black-necked Stilt, Western, Clark's, and Eared Grebes, and California Gull. In Texas, monsoonal rains arrived in the High Plains and the Trans-Pecos in late July, stimulating a flurry of nesting activity but also widespread flooding. In El Paso, over 25 cm fell in just the last week of the month. Adjacent New Mexico and Arizona likewise had a hot, dry June broken in July by welcome monsoons. Colorado's dry June got some relief in July; Wyoming was mostly drier, though some areas had average amounts of rainfall over the summer. Wildfires were not nearly as severe as in recent season, though

Utah and Nevada were both again plagued by fires, which accelerate the spread of exotic grasses, especially in the Mojave Desert. The Pacific Northwest had near-normal precipitation, with moderate deficits in parts of British Columbia.

Tropical storms were few this season, but that is not unusual, as these storms normally begin in earnest in August and peak in early to mid-September. On 10 June, Tropical Storm *Alberto* formed west of Cuba and headed to the northeast, its winds strengthening to 70 mph the next day. *Alberto* made a midday landfall on 13 June about 85 km southeast of Tallahassee, Florida, with winds of about 45 mph and a storm surge of almost two meters to the Big Bend area of the Florida coastline. The storm then tracked across Georgia and the Carolinas, bringing heavy rains, before being downgraded to a tropical depression early on 14 June. As expected, a few terns were associated with this relatively weak storm: eight Common, six Black, and 16 Sooty Terns and nine Brown Noddies were moved into Florida's Gulf Coast, and a Sooty was found as far inland as Lake Apopka the next day. This storm's surge flooded out dozens of Least Tern and Black Skimmer nests in Pinellas County, Florida.

For this season's essay, we will take a summer holiday from the inexorable, if uneven, northward march of herons, ibises, kites, and doves—which have become hallmarks not

just of summer but of spring and autumn as well—and focus on less-familiar themes, on small incremental changes in range, and on the one big multi-regional story of the season: the movements of Dickcissels, Cassin's Sparrows, and Henslow's Sparrows at mid-continent. In a season that seemed, for lack of a subtler phrase, “business as usual,” comments are organized mostly by phylogenetic sequence, which in the Americas now begins with waterfowl.

## Waterfowl

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, whose long-distance vagrancy in the Lower 48 states goes back only about 15 years, were detected in numbers similar to those of 2003, a year in which about 95 turned up out of range (Brinkley 2003). Singles visited Maryland, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, and New Mexico, with a more extreme outlier north to Lancaster County, Nebraska, plus six birds between Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and adjacent Berks County. Not surprisingly, areas closer to core range had more records: Virginia (22 birds total), Georgia, northern Florida, central Louisiana, and central Texas—with breeding documented in most of these areas. The breadth of these recent flights is remarkable and suggests that multiple populations are in exodus, mostly as post-breeding wanderers, it appears, but range extensions have followed such flights in many areas, and more are to be expected.

Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, by contrast, were scarcely mentioned: one found in New County, Missouri 3 June and two in Bosque, New Mexico 9 July were among the few reported out of range away from Texas, California, and Florida. It is of interest that these *Dendrocygna* exhibit such differences in their dispersal patterns—perhaps related to Black-bellied's ability to adapt well to human-modified, even heavily urbanized environments and to its recent population growth in Gulf coast states. One has to wonder whether the declining Fulvous Whistling-Duck could soon be a candidate for federal listing as Threatened. It is not a numerous species in the United States, and the recent sharp increase in U.S. waterfowl hunters visiting Mexico bodes poorly for this and many other anatids: bag limits are not well enforced in Mexico, and many lodges and outfitters advertise “liberal limits” to attract more business. It is sometimes assumed that the recent irruptions of Black-bellied Whistling-Duck relate to cli-



**Figure 2.** Kittlitz's Murrelet (this chick photographed on Kodiak Island, Alaska, 6 August 2006) forages along tidewater glaciers, or near the outflow of glacier streams, nesting in adjacent icy alpine areas on bare ground. This relationship with glaciers is unique among seabirds. Over the past 15 years, the species has been carefully studied in Alaska, and a decline of 80-90% in its population has been documented, in tandem with the rapid recession of glaciers and ice fields, surely the result of global climate change. Researchers John Piatt and Kathy Kuletz warn that the species may be faced with extinction in the near future; see “Farewell to the Glacier Murrelet?” (<<http://www.alaskabird.org/ABONewsletters/ABONews0503.pdf>>). Photograph by Stacy Studebaker.

mate change, and that may be the case. But Fulvous has shown range-wide irruptive patterns for over a century (in the United States, most recently in the early 1960s), and these dispersals almost certainly relate to regional conditions and breeding success (or failure) rather than climate change in the recent sense. The impacts of hunting on this species are not well known.

Several regional reports mentioned swans lingering outside of breeding areas or even breeding in new areas, particularly in western Canada. The state of Washington had two Trumpeter Swans in mid-July on Port Susan Bay, plus two singles elsewhere and 13 Tundra Swans between three sites. Trumpeters nested for the first time in Illinois (Carroll County), and two summered in Maryland. Eurasian swans turned up as well. Single Whooper Swans in the Yukon at Herschel Island (a territory first) and in Nome, Alaska at Safety Lagoon were both immature/subadult birds, which might be expected to linger into June, and two Bewick's Swans were at St. Paul Island, Alaska, in the second week of June. Few other waterfowl made headlines: nesting Common Mergansers in North Dakota (first in nearly 100 years for the state); a Mottled Duck at Saylorville, Iowa (state first); a Mexican Duck in Colorado (state first); and a Cinnamon Teal in Pennsylvania. And what does one do with a Ruddy Shelduck at the Grand Forks Lagoons, North Dakota 27 June through 8 July? The species has turned up in summer and early autumn along the East

Coast, as well as in Nunavut, a period that agrees with the peak of vagrancy in Europe (Sharp 2004). We should watch records of this species to see if the pattern persists.

## Seabirds & storks

Seabirds were in the news chiefly in the coastal states, as is typical—but Wyoming's Streaked Shearwater carcass (see Faulkner 2006) was a clear exception. Summering Pacific Loons, a minor trend that seems to be increasing in recent years in interior areas, were found in Texas, Nebraska, and Indiana; a Red-throated Loon in Iowa and an ailing Arctic Loon in Newport Beach, California were rarer still. Manx Shearwater may be breeding in Nova Scotia, though evidence is elusive (see the Special Attention box in the Atlantic Provinces regional report), and is now regular in the northern Gulf of Alaska; and an Audubon's Shearwater was seen near

Punta Arena, Baja California Sur, a first for the entire Baja peninsula. Yellow-nosed Albatross has been reported almost annually in recent years in the East: following North Carolina's spring bird, singles visited New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts this summer. How many individuals are involved? Storm-petrels made few waves, by contrast, other than North Carolina's second Black-bellied Storm-Petrel and Oregon's much-awaited first Ashy Storm-Petrel (a species relatively common just across the line in California waters); Oregon also had a probable Murphy's Petrel.

Pelecaniforms seemed less prominent as wanderers this summer than last, perhaps to do with more “normal” weather patterns. After their strong spring showing in the East, Magnificent Frigatebirds were noted into late June in Virginia (two), into mid-July in the Carolinas (seven), with singles in New York, New Jersey, and at Victoria, British Columbia, where one was observed soaring with Turkey Vultures 27 June (the province's ninth); this last record is particularly surprising in light of the sharp decline in frigatebird reports from California, mentioned by Guy McCaskie and Kimball Garrett. Maine's second Red-billed Tropicbird followed last year's first state record, but other pelecyaniforms far out of range were few: New Brunswick and Nova Scotia enjoyed an American White Pelican, and Ohio had its first Anhinga (aside from an old specimen that cannot be located).

Records of extralimital Wood Storks appear to be on the rise in the past 10 years or so, af-

ter a relative hiatus in the 1970s and 1980s that corresponded with the tremendous decline in the Florida population. This season, the small colony in North Carolina, the northernmost nesters anywhere, increased to about 100 birds, and numbers reached 150 at Red Slough, Oklahoma, where the species is now expected. Wanderers were found in Virginia (four), Indiana (three; only the third state record since 1945), eastern Tennessee (one), and Saunders County, Nebraska.

### Raptors, rails, & cranes

Merlins continue to make mention, nesting in Pennsylvania for first time (on the heels of multiple nestings in upstate New York), establishing the southernmost nest site in New England (at Keene, New Hampshire), and appearing in Colorado and northern California at midseason, perhaps a prelude to nesting in those states. Wayne Petersen predicts nesting in southern New England by the end of the decade! White-tailed Hawks are also moving around, with a subadult documented in Jeff Davis County, Texas—a location in far western Texas that, the regional editors note, is equally remote from the nearest points in the species' regular range, in southern Chihuahua and southeastern Texas. This species has also been turning up in odd areas within Mexico. Other records of southern raptors northwest of usual areas included a Zone-tailed Hawk near Silver Reef, Utah 14 July and the continuing Common Black-Hawk in Sonoma County, California. Crested Caracaras continue to explore the California coast; three were reported this season.

Purple Gallinules out of range were found as far north as Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Purple Swamphen, an exotic species in North America limited to Florida (aside from a problematic Delaware record) is now being "eradicated" in Florida, on behalf of other wetland species, some of which are already beleaguered. Sandhill Crane shows no sign of slowing its reclamation of historic range, from areas as diverse as central Ontario, western Colorado, upstate New York, northern California, and Maine. Massachusetts had a few summering cranes (breeding is possible, though never documented in the past), and other reports of wanderers came from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and St. Pierre. In Ohio, the count of 15 nesting pairs tied record high—from 1875—while Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Missouri had that state's second nesting attempt ever. A few other cranes were seen around Iowa and Missouri through the season. In Nebraska, new nesting

sites have been found annually in recent years, with Morrill County added to the list this summer. Good news for Whooping Cranes came from Wisconsin, where for the first time in over a century, wild-hatched birds were documented 22 June at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, part of the experimental flock that migrates to Florida. (Most unfortunately, a severe storm in Florida in 1-2 February 2007 would kill all 18 of the young birds hatched in 2006.)

### Charadriiforms

Whitewater Lake, Manitoba, host to the province's first nest of White-faced Ibis last summer, held two nesting pairs of Black-necked Stilts, also a provincial first nesting. The regional reports also have much news on



**Figure 3.** This male Broad-billed Hummingbird, furnishing a first New York record, was present at the home of Dorothy and Harold Legg in the Town of Rose, Wayne County, New York 24 (here) and 25 July 2006. This species has shown a surprisingly varied pattern of vagrancy in recent years, one rather unlike the late-autumn pattern of other western hummers. Photograph by Harold Legg.

nesting plovers (particularly Piping, Snowy, and Mountain), and Ohio turned in its third nesting record of Wilson's Phalarope, But the regional reports carry little information on nesting of other shorebirds, which is difficult to gauge, even with intensive surveys in the Arctic nesting grounds (see the Northern Canada report), and even with regular, dutiful coverage by birders of traditional stopover sites, as in New England and Ontario (where "good" counts were tendered). A Wilson's Plover in New York continues that species' recent trend of extralimital wandering in spring and summer (Leukering and Gibbons 2005, Brinkley 2006), and other extralimital plovers were a Snowy in North Carolina and a Pacific Golden-Plover at Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. However, the plover of the season was surely Maryland's Southern Lapwing, a well-documented individual of the subspecies *cayennensis*, which has shown a remarkable northward spread in central America and the southern Caribbean. It would be difficult to

improve on the Special Attention box in the Middle Atlantic regional report, which builds a case for legitimate vagrancy. Another Southern Lapwing in Florida may have been in the same boat, but at least some Florida records do pertain to escaped aviary birds (subspecies *lampronotus*).

Summer is typically a good season for Eurasian shorebirds, including a few stints and godwits. Massachusetts had a popular Black-tailed Godwit, while Newfoundland enjoyed a Bar-tailed, but rarer still, "a small gray godwit with orange-buff underwing coverts" at Dungeness Bay, Clallam County Oregon in late July was thought to be a Bar-tailed Godwit × Marbled Godwit hybrid. Red-necked Stints were nicely documented in Connecticut, Montana, and the Yukon, and Little Stints appeared in British Columbia and California. Single Curlew Sandpipers were in Montana, California, and Texas, while Ruffs made it to Iowa, Illinois, Québec (two), Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, and Kentucky; most of the latter were on the usual July dates (8-31 July), but the Massachusetts bird was found on the odd date of 6 June, late for a spring bird, as Ruff is usually an early migrant at that season.

Gulls are scrutinized year-round, not just in the cooler months, and though worn or sun-bleached plumages can present identification challenges in summer, birders made some surprising discoveries this season. Great Black-backed Gull continues to expand its breeding range (Pennsylvania recorded its first nesting) as well as to stray westward, with North Dakota's fourth found at Grand Forks 30 June; when will Californians discover their first? Away from Alaska, Slaty-backed Gull is still a rarity but is also distinctly increasing, with singles this season at Grand Marais, Minnesota, and Cambridge Bay, Nunavut. Another species of northeastern Siberia, Black-tailed Gull turned up at Churchill, Manitoba (that town's twentieth gull species) and at Anchorage, Alaska, the latter only the third record from that section of the state. Utah and Colorado both had Sabine's Gulls, the former a second-cycle bird on 26 July (early migrant?), the latter a rare basic-plumaged adult through 2 June—a late spring migrant (?) but in a plumage not previously recorded in the state. If these species aren't enough to motivate a birder to get out and look at gulls in summer, how about Québec's Ross's Gull, found at Moisie 23 and 28 June? Even those who missed it could be consoled with decent counts of Little Gull, of which 22 were found in that province and a

further 27 in Ontario this season, both high count for midyear in the southern reaches of both provinces.

Arctic Tern, a pearl of interior reservoirs like the smaller gulls, was detected far more often this summer than typically: at Lake McConaughy, Nebraska 11 June (that state's third); at Balmorhea Lake 1-11 June and Fort Hancock Reservoir, both Texas 9 June (the state's sixth and seventh); and Lake Avalon 3 July and Elephant Butte Lake, both New Mexico 29-30 July (its tenth and eleventh). In Colorado, an unprecedented *four* Arctic Terns frequented John Martin Reservoir 20-22 June. These records generally fit well with the pattern of June migrants through the middle of the continent (Dinsmore and Jorgensen 2001). Coastal Arctics, other than wind-drifted early June migrants, included one at Fort Morgan, Alabama 5 July (a state first), *seven* in New York 2-9 July, and one at Spring Lake, New Jersey 19 July. Like the interior records, July records of Arctic Tern are also increasing in recent years, probably, as Bob Paxton and Dick Veit suggest, because observers are more prepared to identify them than in the past. Other extralimital terns included a Roseate Tern in Newfoundland (a long overdue first for the province), a Royal Tern in Québec (first documented there), and a Least Tern near Calgary, Alberta. Texans recorded four Brown Noddies, and both Maine and Massachusetts had Bridled Terns.

Alcid news was scant this season. Birders visiting Alaska found Black Guillemots at Nome in mid-June, and they are suspected of local nesting there. Their presence may be ephemeral, linked to the heavy sea-ice conditions of this spring and summer. Another species linked to ice, Kittlitz's Murrelet (Figure 2), was the subject of much study and discussion this season. Often nicknamed the "Glacier Murrelet," this enigmatic bird resembles its close relative, Marbled Murrelet, but forages almost solely around the face of glacial meltwaters and streams, nesting on the ground in nearby scree and alpine habitat. Surveys (see the Alaska regional report) over the past 15 years have found declines of almost 90 per cent in populations of Kittlitz's in Alaska, which appear to correspond to the recession of glaciers in the state. Despite this documented decline, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has declined to confer status as Endangered or Threatened upon this disappearing species. Researchers John Piatt and Kathy Kuletz, in an overview of the species' situation entitled "Farewell to the Glacier Murrelet?" (<<http://www.alaskabird.org/ABO>

Newsletters/ABONews0503.pdf>), write: "The fate of the Kittlitz's Murrelet may hinge on the fate of Alaska's glaciers, and therefore Kittlitz's may be among the world's first avian species to succumb to the effects of rising global temperatures."

## Hummingbirds through Thrushes

In past years, June and July seemed to be rather tranquil months for stray hummingbirds, but Green Violet-ear began to break that pattern, often appearing far out of range in summer, and even more recently Broad-billed Hummingbird has started to break the summer doldrums, as one surely did in Rose, New York (Figure 3). Closer to the Mexican border, Berylline Hummingbirds numbered four or five in Arizona, a high count, and one in New Mexico, where rarer. On the French island of St. Pierre, an apparent Common Swift was photographed 2 June; images (not available as of press time) show an *Apus* swift, but it is difficult to say which one, as the bird is in silhouette.

Along with many plains species, Greater Roadrunner continues its northward march, this season into four new counties of central Kansas; could one reach Nebraska? Increasing in recent seasons as a stray from core range, Lesser Nighthawks appeared at Iona, British Columbia 30 June (a dead bird) and Beverly Beach, Washington 21-22 June, a cluster of records that suggests displacement by weather. But on 5 June, a first-summer male Lesser Nighthawk was photographed 80 km off Vancouver Island, British Columbia, indicating that whatever brought these birds northward was not limited to the last part of the month. There are no previous records of this species for the Pacific Northwest and only one for Canada otherwise. Even for a post-invasion season, the large number of Snowy Owls—12—that attempted to summer in the Lower 48 was remarkable; all but one were in northern-tier states: New York (four), Michigan (three), Wisconsin (three), Minnesota (one), and Massachusetts (one). Other owls of note included Burrowing Owls in Maine at Columbia Falls, Maine 15 July and later, and in Warren County, Illinois 28-29 June. A Mottled Owl at Frontera Audubon Sanctuary in Weslaco, Texas 5-11 July was a Texas (and U.S.) second.

Scissor-tailed Flycatcher continued to consolidate gains in breeding range along its margins in Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, Nebraska, and Alabama, and wanderers made it to Ohio, Nova Scotia (two), Québec, Massachusetts, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and

Wisconsin. Gray Kingbird began re-colonizing coastal Alabama, from which it disappeared after Hurricane *Danny* of 1997. Although Fork-tailed Flycatcher is typically a coastal vagrant in autumn, it may appear almost anywhere during summer, as this season's records from Pennsylvania, Québec, and Newfoundland (its second) attest; the Pennsylvania bird was identified as a second-year bird of the Mexican subspecies *monachus*. A Black-whiskered Vireo in North Carolina and a Brown-chested Martin in Connecticut raise interesting questions about subspecies as well: a Virginia record of the vireo apparently pertained to a West Indian (not North American) taxon, while all records of the martin (from Arizona, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Florida) have been attributed to the South American subspecies *fusca*. The Connecticut martin lacked the spotted mid-breast of *fusca* and apparently more closely resembled subspecies *tapera* of northern South America, which is thought to be mostly sedentary. Alas, there was no happy news about Loggerhead Shrike; where it was mentioned, as in Ohio or Manitoba, it seemed almost as a ghost with a ghost's chance. Even in Mexico, where once abundant, the species appears to be succumbing to intense development and the conversion of traditionally cultivated land to modern agriculture or other uses.

Almost all expanding species (other than introduced or "re-introduced" species) mentioned in recent seasons have been southern species moving northward—Acadian Flycatcher, Louisiana Waterthrush, Red-bellied Woodpecker (nesting confirmed in Maine and Nova Scotia this season), Chuck-will's-widow, Bewick's Wren, Great-tailed Grackle—but a few northern birds have been found south of usual range. Good recent examples, in addition to Merlin (above), are Red-breasted Nuthatch in the southeastern states, sometimes found in plantings of spruce or pine (Renfrew 2005), and, to a much lesser degree, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, two of which held territories in a cemetery in Hettinger, North Dakota this season (the state has no nesting records of the species). Common Ravens inched coastward and southward in the East as well, with nestings documented in Raleigh and Southern Pines, North Carolina, and in Secaucus, New Jersey. At the other border of the United States, New Mexico at last recorded its first Black-capped Gnatcatcher—not surprisingly in Guadalupe Canyon, in habitat much like that of adjacent Arizona. The pair was found feeding young in late July, so that the state's first record also became its first nesting record!

Thrushes, thrashers, and relatives garner less comment in summer than at other seasons, but a few species made mention this season. Northern Wheatears nested for the first time at Churchill, Manitoba, and a Dusky Thrush turned up at Barrow in mid-June, only the second for Alaska's North Slope. In Arizona, a strong flight of the enigmatic, peripatetic Aztec Thrush was well documented in southeastern Arizona, where minimally 11 were noted 9 July through 1 August or so; the only larger invasion came in 1996, when 16 were found. New Mexico, which has just a fraction of the birding coverage that Arizona does, turned up its very first Aztec Thrush at Santa Fe on 15 July. Meanwhile, as Mexican birds move northward, so do southwestern birds: a Sage Thrasher on territory in Luce County Michigan for two weeks (28 June–13 July) and a female Phainopepla near Beulah, Colorado (10–15 June) were equally unexpected.

### Warblers through Sparrows

Extralimital warblers detected in early June are typically birds “left over” from spring migration (which, for this journal's purposes, “ends” on 31 May, the last day of meteorological spring), some of which linger to pioneer territories well out of range. A Prothonotary Warbler in Québec 4 June and Swainson's Warblers in Ontario 3 June and Pennsylvania 10 June were surely spring-season birds. However, a Virginia's Warbler mist-netted and photographed in Kalamazoo County, Michigan 25 June, and identified as a second-year female, was a genuine anomaly. “Eastern: warblers in the West were relatively fewer than normal this June; a Magnolia Warbler in Nevada was a stand-out rarity there. Parulas were found well to the north and west of usual range: a male Tropical Parula was photographed at Portal, Arizona 16–23 June, and a singing male Northern Parula at Victoria, British Columbia 13 June represented just the eighth provincial record; other single Northerners were in Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, and Oregon, and over a dozen were in California. Rarely reported, a Grace's Warbler × Yellow-rumped Warbler hybrid was studied in the Sierra Prieta Mountains of Arizona 4 June. Thanks to conservation efforts on its behalf, Kirtland's Warbler again enjoyed a banner nesting season: 1478 were found singing in Michigan, three in Wisconsin, and two in Ontario—breaking the previous season's all-time high count.

Icterids inched ahead in some cases—Rhode Island's first Boat-tailed Grackle is a

good example—but some moved considerable distances: Wisconsin and Colorado both recorded state-second Hooded Orioles (19 July and 18 June, respectively), Utah had an Orchard Oriole, and Northern Canada had multiple Yellow-headed Blackbirds (in the Yukon), a Brown-headed Cowbird, and a Baltimore Oriole (both at Arviat, Nunavut!). Bronzed Cowbird was confirmed as a breeding species east of the Mississippi River for



**Figure 4.** Dickcissels strayed across the continent in June, as evidenced by unusually high numbers reported across the northern Great Plains, Midwest, and even Northeast. This male ended up in Ashton, eastern Idaho, where found by Doug Ervin 30 June 2006 (here), a first record for the state. Photograph by Darren Clark.

the first time: in Miami-Dade County, Florida, where record of the species have steadily increased in recent years. Buntings and grosbeaks showed less astonishing vagrancy than in most recent seasons, but there were a few colorful exceptions: Iowa's first Painted Bunting, Montana's fourth Blue Grosbeaks (a pair; seven in North Dakota was an all-time high), and a male Yellow Grosbeak near Bishop, California. Tanagers likewise crept along: a male Flame-colored Tanager in Big Bend National Park, Texas 2 July would be only a state sixth, and nesting Summer Tanagers in Colorado and in Cook County, Illinois—where a male Scarlet Tanager served as nest helper, feeding the fledgling Summers!

“It was the year of the Dickcissel,” writes Ron Martin, referring to the staggering high counts of the species in North Dakota and

eastern Montana this season; “a banner year,” echo Joe Grzybowski and Ross Silcock, writing of the influx into western Nebraska. Presumably driven by the drought conditions over much of their core range, Dickcissels made movements that exceeded even the big exoduses of the 1970s. In North Dakota, counts over 100 were widespread, and birds nested as far north as J. Clark Salyer National Wildlife Refuge, not far from the Canadian

border. Montana had at least 37 Dickcissels—far fewer than North Dakota, but the state had only about 17 *total* reports before this season! To the west, Dickcissels were described as “more widespread and numerous than is typical” on the eastern plains of Colorado, and one even reached the state's West Slope at Paonia. Farther yet to the west, a Dickcissel made it all the way to Ashton, Idaho—a first for that state (Figure 4). Across the border in central-southern Canada, it was the “strongest Dickcissel irruption since 1973,” note Rudolf Koes and Peter Taylor. Most birds were observed just north of the North Dakota birds, in the prairies and farms of southeastern Saskatchewan and southwestern Manitoba—counts of up to 37 birds, with the majority coming from alfalfa fields. Nebraskans saw nesting Dickcissels move unexpectedly west-

ward, as far to the northwest as Valentine; normally, according to Grzybowski and Silcock, drought years see *eastward* shifts in Dickcissel range. In the East, only a minor incursion of Dickcissel was observed, in upstate New York (two sites), Ontario (six sites), Maryland (two sites), and Virginia (four sites), but 39 in one field near Newburg, Pennsylvania suggests that more may have been around. In the Midwest, Indiana logged its second highest single-day count (164) in Gibson County 1 July, while Illinois had multiple counts over 120 per day.

Although Cassin's Sparrows do range as far from core range as Dickcissels, ranges of the two species are said to "shift harmoniously" in most drought years, according to editors from Oklahoma to Colorado. Such a shift was certainly detected in 2006, and Cassin's were heard delivering their heavenly melody in areas where often absent, from western New Mexico, to seven counties of central Texas, even to three counties of the San Luis Valley and to North Table Mountain, both in Colorado, where the species is both irregular and rare.

Henslow's Sparrow presents quite a different story, one that bears monitoring. For several years now, the species has shown declines on the eastern edges of its range but expansion on the western. This season, only New York reported a continued decline. The easternmost nesters in the range must be in Virginia—which has had no confirmed territorial Henslow's in saltmarsh habitat for about 15 years but which turned in a report of a singing bird at Wallops Island 22-23 June. On the western edge of breeding range, up to 23 Henslow's were tallied in southeastern Nebraska, and six in Johnson County, Kansas made a good local count. In core range, "good nesting" was reported in Illinois, with counts as high as 58 per site. Jim Dinsmore reports a continued "amazing increase" in Iowa, where 24 counties had Henslow's. Southeastern Missouri even turned in a count of ten. Likewise, on the southern edge of range, Brainard Palmer-Ball and Chris Sloan report a continued increase in Tennessee, where three new colonies were found (counts up to 80 singing males), and in Kentucky, where five new colonies were detected. On the northern edge of range, Point Pelee, Ontario had a record-late spring migrant Henslow's Sparrow 2 June, and an apparently unmated male sang at Carden, Ontario for the first half of July. The species has become quite rare in Ontario in recent times. One near Huntingdon, Québec 2-27 June furnished the first local record since 1989. Just as for Dickcissels, haying op-

erations frequently occur when adult sparrows are feeding young or on eggs, and so breeding success is often poor. Birders are sometimes able to persuade landowners to delay mowing, and a few such success stories are reported in this issue.

## Business as unusual

How does one summarize a season in which bird stories, aside from a sprinkling of rarities, seemed "normal"? Perhaps our baselines have shifted so much from those of a decade ago that we think nothing of record-hot summers and tropical species visiting boreal climes. If we were to take this season's records—summering Slaty-backed Gulls not far from breeding Dickcissels, a Lesser Nighthawk flying around with Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels, a Broad-billed Hummingbird on the shores of Lake Ontario—and move them back in time just ten years, this essay would have been filled with exclamation points, that dreaded form of punctuation reserved for only the most outlandish occurrences. While we should be mindful of how our perspectives change over time in this rapidly changing world, and how rapidly we grow accustomed to what were once avian anomalies, we should take a moment, too, to enjoy some of the good news in these pages: by and large, over much of the continent, the nesting season was quite successful for a great variety of birds.

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