

Middle Atlantic Coast Region

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The spring was cool and wet, with precipitation nearly twice normal in some areas. Reporting was generally poor and little information was received about passerine migration. The summary of sightings from Virginia was not available at press time, and only a few Virginia sightings are included. Spillover from the extraordinary winter season, a record season at Fort Smallwood, and an outbreak of avian cholera in the Chesapeake Bay dominated the news. The pattern of the past 20 years continued this spring as the passerine migration continued to evaporate.

Abbreviations: C.B.B.T. (*Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel*); C.N.W.R. (*Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge*); D.C. (*District of Columbia*); E.S.N.W.R. (*Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge*)

Loons to Ibises

Red-throated Loons were generally in low numbers on the coast, but 500 were seen from the n. end of Assateague I., and 200 from a fishing boat off Ocean City (MLH), both Apr. 17. Thirteen well up the Potomac R. at Cobb's I., *Charles*, MD Apr. 3 was a good count (GJ, JLS, MI). Solem felt the Com. Loon flight in *Howard*, MD was poor. The high count on the coast was 106 at Assateague I., May 9 (MLH). The unprecedented Red-necked Grebe invasion that began in February (see *FN*48:2) continued well into the spring, with birds remaining at several locations in late April (v.o.). Red-neckeds were reported at 4 inland sites into May (v.o.); there is only one previous May record for Maryland. Especially notable were two at Piney Run, *Carroll* until May 27 (RFR), and single birds through the end of the period at Loch Raven Res., *Baltimore* (SWS), and Sandy Point S.P., *Anne Arundel* (HLW, LD). The largest numbers were in early March, with 70 at Ocean City, 30 at Ft. Smallwood, *Anne Arundel*, and 77 in D.C., all Mar. 4 (v.o.). Red-neckeds left the E. Shore much earlier than elsewhere, with only one April report there. Details of the invasion will be published elsewhere.

Horned Grebes were also in above-average numbers for recent years (v.o.), with high counts of 159 in Ocean City Mar. 4

(MLH, MO) and 27 at Kent Narrows, *Queen Annes*, MD Mar. 24 (JR). Eared Grebes had one of their best showings ever with singles at Ocean City Mar. 4 (MLH, MO), D.C., Mar. 4-13 (AS, FD, TU, JMA), and Centennial L., Mar. 30-Apr. 3, providing a first *Howard* record (JF, m.ob.). Topping off the grebe extravaganza was Maryland's fourth or fifth and *Worcester's* first Western Grebe in the surf off Assateague I., Apr. 24-May 12 (MLH, et al.). This may be the first time that all the grebes recorded in the east were found in Maryland in one season.

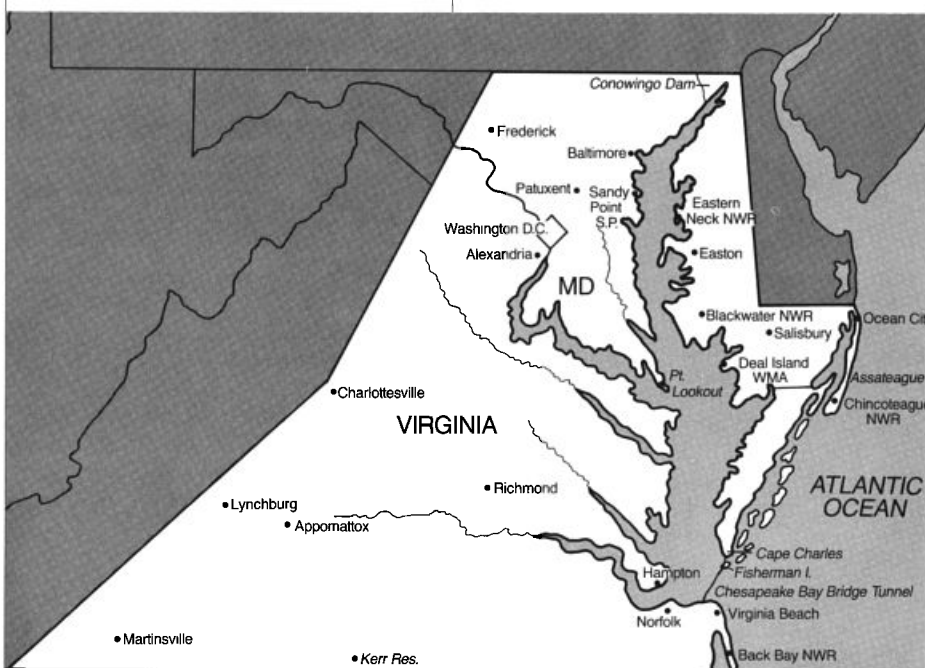
Pelagic birding is in a slump in the Region and the only notable reports of tubenoses were approximately 15 N. Fulmars (both light and dark morphs) off Ocean City Mar. 12 (BP et al.). No large number of N. Gannets were reported from the Chesapeake Bay, breaking a six-year string, but 1913 were off Ocean City Mar. 12 (BP et al.). A few are seen from shore in early May, but 14 at Ocean City May 21 (HTA) was notable at that date. The only Brown Pelicans reported were three at Assateague I., Apr. 16 (MLH), far more indicative of reporting than of occurrence in the Region. Virginia's annual Am. White Pelicans were at Hopewell Mar. 13 (J. Kacmarcik). Great Cormorants turned up away from the coast at Nanticoke, *Wicomico*, MD Mar. 5 (SHD), on the Potomac R. in *Charles* Mar. 19 (GJ), at Back R. in *Baltimore* Apr. 17 (EJS), and in *Montgomery* at Little Seneca Res. Apr. 20 (DC, ph.). Double-crested Cormorants were widespread and numerous, but 1500 at Conowingo Dam, *Harford* (RB, EJS) was impressive. A ♀ *Anhinga* was well described on the Po-

tomac R. off Great Falls Apr. 30 (DCH) for one of the few Maryland and the first *Montgomery* record.

American Bitterns were reported in average numbers, but three at Oxen Creek, *Prince George's* May 24 were well after the normal migration period (GJ). The Great Blue Heron colony at Barren I., *Dorchester* was as big or bigger than ever with 63 nests May 29 (HTA). For the 2nd consecutive year nesting was attempted on the Patapsco R. in *Howard*, but no young were seen (JF). Green Herons were thought to be in low numbers (v.o.) and Hoffman found only one in *Worcester* during his weekly surveys. A Yellow-crowned Night-Heron nest was found at The Johns Hopkins University campus, *Baltimore* May 11, furnishing a first for the location (SG). Two were at the traditional site at L. Roland, *Baltimore* Apr. 18 (DCH) and two were at Huntley Meadows, VA May 30 (JMA).

Waterfowl

It is probably too much to hope that it is a trend, but Armistead was surprised to find no Mute Swan nests on Barren I., *Dorchester* May 29, where they have nested in recent years. It was a below-average spring for rare geese. The only Greater White-fronted was at Steven's Corner, *Queen Anne's* Mar. 26 (AH), and the only Ross' was near St. Martin's, *Worcester* Mar. 19 (MLH). The Brant that wintered at D.C. was last seen Mar. 23 (BD et al.). For the 2nd consecutive year, **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** were found in the Region, with two at a pond near Locustville, *Accomac*, VA May 19. The birds were studied by >30 observers and were not banded nor were the



toes clipped (*fide* HTA). Eurasian Wigeons were well above average with singles at Hebron, *Wicomico*, MD Mar. 15–19 (JLS, SHD et al.); Greensboro, *Caroline* Mar. 11 (RFR); St. Martin's, *Worcester* Mar. 19–20 (MLH et al.); Triadelphia Res., *Howard* Mar. 27 (JF, JS, PDa) and probably the same bird on a nearby pond Mar. 29–Apr. 11 (MW); Swan Point, *Charles* Mar. 29 (GJ); and Williamsburg, VA Mar. 19–20 (BW). Noteworthy were 500 Canvasbacks on the Potomac R. at Rt. 301, *Charles* Mar. 20 (RFR, EB). Redheads were more widely reported than usual, but the high count was only 20, at Loch Raven Res., *Baltimore* Mar. 12 (SWS). The best count of Ring-necked Ducks was a fairly low 380 (including only 30 females) at Duckett Res., *Howard* Mar. 11 (JS, CB, BO). Piney Run Res., *Carroll* hosted a surprising array of late ducks well into May, including Ring-necked, Ruddy, Lesser Scaup, Surf Scoter, and Red-breasted and Hooded mergansers (RFR). Another late Hooded was at Hughes Hollow, *Montgomery* May 14 (RH). The species is an occasional breeder in the Region and May birds deserve watching.

Rare inland in the spring was a Black Scoter at Centennial L., *Howard* for the 3rd county record (M&RB). A ♂ Tufted Duck was at L. Anna, VA Mar. 6–7 (TS, MB). The status of the species in the Region has always been open to question. At Ocean City the five Com. and one King eiders remained until late March (v.o.), and of seven wintering Harlequins, two were still present May 1 (MLH). At least one Harlequin and one Com. Eider remained at the C.B.B.T. through Apr. 9 (J. Kacmarcik).

A severe outbreak of avian cholera in the Chesapeake Bay killed many ducks, with some grebes and loons also reported affected. According to a report by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, about 55,000 birds died; 75% were Oldsquaw. Over 21,000 carcasses were recovered in Virginia and 13,000 in Maryland. There was also significant mortality among scoters, Bufflehead, and goldeneyes. Few dabbling ducks were affected.

Raptors to Rails

Spring raptor coverage at Ft. Smallwood continued to improve and several new records were set this year. The seasonal total of 10,653 was only slightly higher than the previous high of 9828 in 1981, but the composition of the flight has changed dramatically in the past decade. This year's 4552 Turkey Vultures topped the previous high of 2750 in 1993, and 146 Black Vultures beat 61 in 1993. The big loser continued to be Sharp-shinned Hawk, with 2531

this year compared to 5153 in 1981. The decline at Smallwood has been persistent and mirrors declines of fall totals at places like Cape May, NJ and Hawk Mt., PA. New records were also set: 704 Cooper's Hawks (previous high 549 in 1993), 321 Red-shouldered Hawks (239 in 1993), and 462 Red-taileds (335 in 1993). The increases in those 3 species and vultures reflects, in part, better coverage in March. The 2 rarities of the season were a late imm. N. Goshawk Apr. 20 (HLW) and a Mississippi Kite June 7 (S. Ricciardi), proving that late coverage has its rewards. This information is from Fritz; complete details are published in the Hawk Migration Association of North America journal.

The only Swallow-tailed Kite was one flying N over Back Bay N.W.R., VA Apr. 30 (B. Ake). An Osprey nest on Little Pipe Cr., May 30 (RFR, BC) provided a first for *Frederick*, and perhaps the westernmost for Maryland. Continuing the excellent winter reports, single N. Goshawks were at Elliot I., *Dorchester* Mar. 12 (HTA); Kensington, *Prince George's* Mar. 9–19 (KS); and the wintering bird at Centennial Park, *Howard* remained until Mar. 31 (BO, JH, JF). Good Merlin counts on Assateague I. included eight Apr. 25 (GJ, JLS) and seven May 8 (MLH). The Gyrfalcon that wintered in s. *Frederick* was last seen Mar. 7 (HH).

Locally rare was a Wild Turkey on Roosevelt I., D.C., Apr. 16 (OJ). A first for the Maryland Piedmont was a Black Rail heard singing in a hay field near Potomac, *Montgomery* May 9–12 (PO, PP, OJ et al.). More expected were 17 at Elliot I., May 14 (HTA), but one at Black Marsh, *Baltimore* (EJS) the same night was at a location where they were found in 1990. The only King Rails w. of the Bay were two at Huntley Meadows, VA Apr. 23 (RH) and May 30 (JMA), and one at Merkle Wildlife Refuge, *Prince George's* May 14 (FWF). Common Moorhens were at 4 locations w. of the Bay, slightly better than average (v.o.).

Shorebirds

Shorebirds either put on a poor show or were poorly reported. A first for *Howard* and one of the few Piedmont records was a Piping Plover at Wilde L., Apr. 29 (BO, JS et al.). The only Am. Golden Plover was on Assateague I., Apr. 24 (MLH). Black-necked Stilts continued to thrive at Deal I., *Somerset*, their only reliable breeding location in Maryland, with eight May 12 (GJ). Two were at Elliot I., where they are occasional, May 14 (HTA). Whimbrels peaked at 100 on Assateague I., Apr. 25–30 (GJ, JLS, MLH). The wintering Red Knot was

still present at Ocean City Mar. 13 (PD) and 40 were on Assateague I., May 9 (MLH). Hoffman conducted shorebird surveys on Assateague I., May 8 & 16, with the following results respectively: Black-bellied Plover 80/200, Semipalmated Plover 100/160, Am. Avocet 0/1, Sanderling 2100/505, Semipalmated Sandpiper 400/1890, Least Sandpiper 575/450, White-rumped Sandpiper 0/9, Dunlin 450/1830, and Short-billed Dowitcher 70/135. The shorebirds ponds on the island are remote and have received little coverage over the years. A ♀ Ruff was near Salisbury, *Worcester* Apr. 24 (SHD) and two were at Blackwater N.W.R., *Dorchester* Apr. 22 (EMW).

Jaegers to Alcids

Single Parasitic Jaegers were at Assateague I., Apr. 30, and 6 mi off Ocean City May 7 (MLH). One was at Ft. Story, VA May 21 (B. Taber). Laughing Gulls are scarce inland in the spring: They were seen in *Howard* on 3 dates (JS) and at Takoma Park, *Prince George's* May 13 (RH). The only Little Gull was at the Rock Hall sewage plant, *Kent*, Apr. 1–2 (PN, WH). Bonaparte's Gulls were widespread in *Howard* with a peak of 90 at Wilde L., Apr. 11 (HZ); numbers elsewhere were below normal, with peaks of 150 at Ocean City Mar. 19 (MLH) and 761 at Back R., Apr. 10 (EJS, DT). A partial albino Ring-billed Gull at Ocean City May 1 was probably the same bird that has been floating around *Worcester* for the past year (MLH). The only Iceland Gull was at Piney Run Mar. 12 (RFR). Lesser Black-backed Gulls were about average, with reports from 9 locations (v.o.). Glaucous Gulls were at Ocean City Mar. 25–Apr. 20 (BD, MLH, SHD), and Sandy Point S.P., *Anne Arundel* May 15–20 (HLW, JM). The only Gull-billed Tern was at Assateague I., May 8 (MLH), and—semi-rare along the coast in spring—Caspian Terns were at Ocean City Mar. 28 (JR) and Assateague I., May 22 (MLH).

The pelagic trip off Ocean City Mar. 12 capped an excellent alcid winter, with 59 Dovekies, 33 Razorbills, one Atlantic Puffin, 59 unidentified large alcids, and Maryland's fourth Common Murre (BP et al.)

Cuckoos to Shrikes

Both cuckoos were reported in about average numbers (v.o.), but Ringler thought Yellow-billeds were scarce in *Carroll*. Three Barn Owls, possible migrants, were heard over Taylor Landing, *Worcester* Mar. 26 (MLH). An early migrant Short-eared Owl was seen at the Ft. Smallwood hawk watch Feb. 20 (PF) and nine were at Elliot I., Mar. 12 (HTA). Rarely reported

in spring, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was at L. Elkhorn, *Howard* May 20 (JW). Rare on the coast were three Willow Flycatchers on Assateague I., May 22 and into June (MLH, HTA, GLA). This is just beyond the s. edge of the breeding range in coastal Delaware, and there is one breeding record for the area. A Cliff Swallow at St. Martin's, *Worcester* May 2 was a nice find on the coast (MLH). Purple Martins were in poor numbers in *Carroll* (RFR). Out-of-range Com. Ravens were at Potomac, *Montgomery* Mar. 22 (C. Hanus) and Clifton Beach, *Charles* Apr. 23 (GJ, JLS).

Red-breasted Nuthatches were widely reported in small numbers but, surprisingly, none lingered into May (v.o.). The Brown-headed Nuthatch that wintered at Back R. was still present Apr. 2 (HE). Sedge Wrens were expected in *Worcester* at Vaughn W.M.A., Mar. 5 and on Assateague I., Apr. 30 (MLH), but not inland at Kinder Park, *Anne Arundel* May 11 (RM), Roosevelt I., D.C., May 8 (TU), and near Bowie, *Prince George's* May 7-8 (JD). The severe winter may have taken a toll on Ruby-crowned Kinglets, which were in very low numbers (v.o.), and Hoffman had only one in *Worcester*, a late bird on Assateague May 8. Thrush counts were not good, and only seven Gray-cheekeds were noted (v.o.). The 2-decade decline of the Brown Thrasher continued; incredibly, Armistead missed the species on both of his May *Dorchester* big days. The virtually extirpated Loggerhead Shrike was back in s. *Frederick* (v.o.), but singles at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, *Prince George's* Mar. 26 (TM) and at King's Landings Park, *Calvert* May 8 (BH) were unexpected.

Vireos to Warblers

Migrants were again reported in very low numbers, although Blackpoll Warblers were fairly numerous (v.o.) A late Solitary Vireo was near Salisbury, *Wicomico* May 27 (SHD) and, very rare in spring, a Philadelphia was in D.C., May 13 (OJ). Rare on the E. Shore in spring, a Warbling Vireo was in *Talbot* May 9 (GLA). Six Golden-winged Warblers was a decent showing by recent standards (v.o.) and "Brewster's" were at Centennial Park Apr. 28 (GA) and Pennyfield, *Montgomery* Apr. 27 (DS). Also rare on the E. Shore, a Cerulean was near Wango, *Wicomico* Apr. 26 (MLH, SHD); one in *Carroll* Apr. 16 provided a record arrival for Maryland (RFR *et al.*). Seven Mournings and seven Wilson's were about average for recent years (v.o.).

Tanagers to Finches

A Summer Tanager at Liberty Watershed May 29+ was a first for *Carroll* (RFR, EJS). The ♂ Painted Bunting, after spending its 2nd consecutive year at a feeder in Berlin, *Worcester*, was last seen Apr. 5 (M. Humphreys *et al.*). An early Dickcissel was at a feeder at Ft. Meade, *Anne Arundel* Apr. 18 (*vide* PD); one was at Curles Neck, VA May 12 (FD), and one-three were at Uniontown May 29-30 (S. Sanford, RFR). A LeConte's Sparrow photographed near Girdletree, *Worcester* Apr. 2 (MLH, DC, MO, MAT) was the 3rd for Maryland this year and the 6th overall. Two Henslow's Sparrows at Saxis, VA May 15 (PM) provided the only report of a species that may have disappeared as a breeder in the Region. Sixteen Lincoln's Sparrows was well above average (v.o.), but none was on the coast and the largest concentration was five at Schooley Mill Park, *Howard* May 14 (NM). A White-throated Sparrow banded in *Baltimore* May 25 had a gray throat, perhaps a hybrid (BMR). White-crowned Sparrows were in good numbers along the coast, including 10 as late as May 3 on Assateague I. (MLH). Forty-thousand Com. Grackles were seen flying W over Eldersburg, *Carroll* Mar. 1, with similar numbers through the first half of the month (RFR). The only Brewer's Blackbird was a female near Jamestown, VA Mar. 21 (B. Taber). Unusual was an apparent imm. ♂ Orchard Oriole with no black on the throat singing at Sandy Cove, *Cecil* May 20 (RFR). A N. Oriole that wintered at Parsonburg, *Wicomico* was last seen Apr. 9 (EP).

The winter finch flight left lingerers well into the spring. Purple Finches were scattered throughout the Region well into April, with a high count of 25 at Darnestown Apr. 1 (RLM). Common Redpolls remained widespread except on the lower E. Shore, with the last two at Denton, *Caroline* Apr. 16 (M. Nuttle). Other information can be found in the winter season report. Pine Siskins were in fair numbers but remained into mid-May and were more concentrated on the coastal plain (v.o.). Evening Grosbeaks, which made a brief appearance in fall but were largely absent during the winter, made a modest reappearance in spring from mid-April to early May (v.o.). Someone may have lost a shipment of Eur. Goldfinches: Three were in D.C. and one in nearby *Montgomery* (v.o.).

Observers: Burton Alexander, Janet M. Anderson, George L. Armistead, Henry T. Armistead, Glenn Austin, Mary Jo & Robert Betts, Mike Boatwright, Connie Bockstie, Carol and Don Broderick, Ed Bruce (EBr), Larry Cartwright, Marty

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