

# The Changing Seasons: Southbound

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Lawrence's Goldfinches dispersed widely in late spring and summer 2007, certainly in response to severe drought across most of its breeding range; most extralimital records of the species come from the post-summer months. This male (two views; here 26 May) at Grand Junction, Colorado spent at least 23 May through 24 July in the area and was seen consorting with a female Lesser Goldfinch. On 3-8 July, it was observed with juveniles that may have been Lesser Goldfinch  $\times$  Lawrence's Goldfinch hybrids. Remarkably, this bird provided Colorado's first record of Lawrence's Goldfinch. Photograph by Bill Schmoker.

## Weather

From Québec through Newfoundland, and south into New England, the summer weather was nearly normal in terms of temperature and precipitation, but some northern areas, such as the Nunavik region of Québec, suffered extensive forest fires—almost 300,000 hectares in the case of Nunavik (four times the norm), and half of these were set by lightning, which is far more frequent now than in past decades. Neighboring Ontario had weather only slightly warmer than average. Farther to the south, temperatures were also mild, but precipitation was above normal in New Jersey, where coastal species lost nests in heavy downpours and flooding. In the Southeast, the

weather was characterized as hot and dry. In the mountains and Piedmont of the Carolinas, the drought was quite notable, while the coast received some rain but shared blistering hot temperatures in July with the rest of the state and the Southeast coast. Georgia and Alabama suffered severe drought. Tropical Storm *Barry*, which made landfall at St. Petersburg, Florida 2 June, before raking the North Carolina coast in the next two days, added relatively little in the way of rain and moved only a few seabirds into coastal areas. One exceptional find, a South Polar Skua at Carter's Lake, Georgia, must have been a *Barry* bird, though it was observed over a week after the passage of the

storm (12-28 June), most unusual. No other tropical systems affected land areas of North America in the season.

In the Midwest, the cool spring with ample rains turned quickly to drought in Ohio and much-drier-than-average conditions in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, western Iowa, and Minnesota. To the south, exceptions were in southwestern Missouri, where heavy rains struck in late June and severe drought hit southern Kentucky and Tennessee. Louisiana and Arkansas reported relatively routine conditions over the two-month period.

West of Ontario, Canada was quite warm and generally dry, and the warming trend in

Arctic areas continued unabated this season. June was generally mild in the Prairie Provinces, and most species appeared to benefit from mild and lush conditions, especially grassland nesters. July, however, warmed up considerably and was dubbed a “blast furnace” by one Saskatchewan observer. To the south, conditions were not as severe. The Great Plains were rather dry in the northern sections, with severe drought in western Nebraska, but spring rains and flooding from northern Texas to central Nebraska continued well into the summer months, and copious rainfall was the hallmark of the season through to the Upper Texas Coast and South Texas.

The northern Rocky Mountains bore the brunt of the summer heat on the continent, as persistent high pressure deflected Pacific air and kept temperatures high. Wyoming's July was its warmest in 113 years, and Colorado's was about the sixth warmest in the same time frame. Both states had moderate precipitation, though the western portions of both states were dry, and southwestern Wyoming suffered extreme drought. Both Montana and Idaho experienced their warmest July in 107 years of record keeping. Glasgow, Montana had seven days with a low temperature of 70° F or above, a new record, while the average daily high in July for Missoula, Montana was 96.6° F—“higher than every city east of the Rocky Mountains—including those in Texas!” according to regional editor David Trochlell. Not surprisingly, mortality among nesting Tree Swallows and Mountain Bluebirds was said to be high in Montana.

The Southwest reported good breeding conditions for most species, although generous July rains in southeastern Arizona and western Texas were less so across New Mexico and western Arizona, especially later in the season. On the Pacific coast, July was quite hot in Oregon and Washington (5°+ F above average), and drought was evident in many areas, especially in June east of the Cascades. Drought was even worse farther south, and central and southern California's habitats, and birds, were very hard hit, so much so that many species probably did not attempt to breed.

## Overshadowed

Southerly birds moving northward—the squeaky wheels that get most of the narrative oil in this column in summer (and often in fall and spring)—have become almost too numerous to track in a column such as this one, and so we tend to look nowadays at whole groups of birds (genera, families, or even birds from like habitats), as much as at par-

ticular species, to see patterns. Herons, doves, kites (of four genera), ibises, terns (Figure 1), and many other groups seem to be moving, nesting, overshooting, or otherwise exploring north of past range.

I mentioned to Paul Lehman once that this pattern seemed to be, “with few exceptions,” the norm for our time, and that birds expanding southward, whether as vagrants or nesters, were negligible in number. Leave it to Paul to expand my meager list. Much of this column will focus on the species mentioned in the regional reports as expanding in a direction other than northward—to the south, for the most part—whether by small or large increments. Some species expand their nesting ranges very slowly, others in more piecemeal patterns, others in wildly widespread satellite populations or even “leapfrog” colonies disjunct by many miles from the edge of typical range. There are, indeed, many more expansions than meet the eye, but because so many of the species involved are common migrants through the areas in which they have been found nesting, the panache associated with them is less than that accorded the splashier southerners, many of which were great local rarities a generation (or even just a few years) ago.

Before delving into the list, let us review a few of the birds we'll be overlooking in this season's regional reports, the Southern Eye Candy we so often feature more prominently. The reasons for their northward movements are surely many, and not all can be tied to rising temperatures or droughts, but many of them can be. Some of the species have been marching northward for a decade or more—Black-bellied Whistling-Duck (north to Pennsylvania; Delaware's third and Bahamas' third records this season; nesting north to South Carolina), Mottled Duck, Gadwall (first nesting in Newfoundland), Brown Pelican (Maine's sixth came this season), Magnificent, or unidentified, Frigatebirds (note, too, extralimital Great and Lesser Frigatebirds in the Californias this season!), Wood Stork (first in Colorado since 1934), Laughing Gull (Washington; now nesting in Illinois), Royal Tern (New Brunswick had its fourth), Black-necked Stilts (“staggering numbers” in Alberta; fourth South Dakota nesting; a dozen in Massachusetts, including copulating birds), Mississippi Kite (Ohio's first nesting ever), Swallow-tailed Kites (three north to Nova Scotia), Glossy Ibis (South Dakota, Oregon), White-faced Ibis, White-winged Dove (breeding again in Nebraska), and Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (Washington's eighth, Alberta's ninth) are birds that even relatively new birders

know to look for out of range, as the newer field guides carry clear information on their extralimital wanderings, and the Internet is replete with news of their comings and goings. Even when not nesting or apparently not nesting, such birds may linger for weeks or months in an area in the summer. Other species—e.g., Yellow-breasted Chat (New Brunswick), American Goldfinch (Labrador), Northern Pintail (far northern Québec), Chuck-will's-widow (Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa), Blue Grosbeak (Montana)—have shown similar, if less dramatic, tendencies to inch northward.

More recently, strengthening patterns of northward dispersal have been detected in species such as Red-billed Tropicbird (Nova Scotia and Maine!), Brown Booby (both coasts), Neotropic Cormorant (Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Mississippi), White Ibis (Tennessee, Ohio, Missouri), Roseate Spoonbill (New Jersey, Missouri), Anhinga (Missouri), Southern Lapwing (nesting in Barbados, first for the Caribbean), Short-tailed Hawk (nesting again in Arizona), Harris's Hawk (fourth for Colorado), Common Black-Hawk (Colorado), Lesser Nighthawk (Ontario), Ash-throated Flycatcher (breeding in Nebraska), Curved-billed Thrasher (a second for Idaho), Hooded Warbler (nesting in Massachusetts; male and female at Malheur, Oregon; bob-tailed juvenile in New Mexico!), Prothonotary Warbler, and Gray Kingbird (eighth for Texas; nesting at Savannah, Georgia). Harder to characterize are wanderers such as Gull-billed Terns in interior Alabama; a species with little record of vagrancy inland, or Elegant Tern in Minnesota, although the latter has started to appear in disparate extralimital settings nearly every year. Snail Kite, found in Texas and South Carolina in summer 2007, has been reported before in these regions, but only rarely, and the few records are old. Dry conditions in the breeding range may have spurred movements by these kites.

The opposite problem—deluges in the southern and central Great Plains through the Texas coast—clearly led to the massive incursion of Snowy Plovers into the northern Great Plains (Dakotas) and central provinces of Canada, where breeding and record-high numbers were documented. While only one Snowy Plover could be found in June at Lake McConaughy, Nebraska (normally a stronghold), 21 in North Dakota made headlines, as there were only nine previous state records; the state's first nest was found at Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge this season. Surprisingly, South Dakota had just eight birds (still only



the fifth state record of the species!), all at Stone Lake, where a chick was seen 17 June—the first evidence of breeding in that state. Surely, many others were not detected in the Dakotas. On the periphery of the exodus, Missouri has its first June Snowy Plover at Eagle Bluffs Conservation Area, and Saskatchewan had a rare visitor at Chaplin Lake. A Snowy in South Carolina, however, was probably part of the Florida/Gulf Coast population, which is presumably responsible for the Atlantic coast records north to Virginia in recent years. Piping Plovers in the central Great Plains were also affected by high water levels in usual nesting areas, but no incursion to the Dakotas or Canada was noted, though one at Arviat, Nunavut, the territory's first, gives one pause.

At the southern reaches of the United States, the tempo of several typically Mexican species is surely picking up. In addition to a handful of both species in southern Texas, a singing White-collared Seedeater at Kino Springs, Arizona and two Yellow-green Vireos in Arizona were exceptional, and that state's fourteenth Yellow Grosbeak turned up at Ash Canyon. Less anticipated, a Crescent-chested Warbler feeding a fledgling in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains provided a first nesting record for the United States. Newer field guides aimed at novice birders are beginning to include this and other former south-of-the-border vagrants, such as Black-capped Gnatcatcher and Rufous-capped Warblers, as they establish breeding stations in Arizona/New Mexico and Texas, respectively. New Mexico, whose southern tiers are more difficult to bird and less canvassed, had a nice Green Kingfisher this season—the first confirmed in the state.

At the farther extremes of our regions, extreme northbound wanderers were also in evidence. The Magellanic Penguin in El Salvador certainly trumps almost any other record from Central America this season, the distant runner-up being a Costa Rica's second Large-billed Tern. But in the northern reaches of Canada's boreal forest, as well as in Alaska, less outlandish species such as American Crow, Magnolia Warbler, Ovenbird, Red-eyed Vireo, and Western Tanager are making more frequent appearances north (and northwest) of typical range, and first territorial records of Turkey Vulture for Nunavut and of American White Pelican for the Yukon—if not as surprising as they might have been a decade or two ago—speak to the general northward shift in distribution of a range of widespread species. We birders who live in more temperate climes do not experience shock and awe on hearing of Nunavut's Turkey Vulture, or of the Great Egret

at Barrow, Alaska, but we should at least put them in a class with New Jersey's Roseate Spoonbill or Maine's Bridled Tern, for instance. A Brown-chested Martin in Illinois, though thousands of miles north of range, may become a staple vagrant, as recent records span the continent, and this species will perhaps turn out to be the new Fork-tailed Flycatcher, another long-distance austral migrant that can show up nearly anywhere during the warmer months—in this season, Illinois and Vieques Island, Puerto Rico!

So much for the species we will *not* be considering in this column, at least for this season.



Figure 1. Holding his cell phone's camera lens up to his spotting scope, the photographer was able to capture this most acceptable image of a Gull-billed Tern at Kettle Cove, Manchester, Massachusetts on 5 June 2007. Such techniques still amaze us; but surely, technological advances in birding are just in their infancy, and it will probably be very soon that we are able to stream live video feeds of such birds to our birding friends. Gull-billed Tern is a great rarity so far to the north, as their early migration (or perhaps their migration's path) seems to place them out of the path of tropical storms, unlike most other terns. Though strictly a coastal species in most areas, Gull-billed Terns turned up inexplicably in interior Alabama in summer 2007. Photograph "phone-scoped" by Rick Heil.

### Slow but steady

Sandhill Crane is the flagship species for a small cadre of birds that seems to be expanding on the periphery of their ranges, including southward and eastward. Three pairs nested in Maine, one in Massachusetts, and a pair in the Champlain Valley of Vermont—in its third year of nesting—was successful at last this summer, furnishing a first state record. Neighboring New York's pair in Savannah nested for the fifth consecutive year, and several other singles were observed in counties to the west, while to the north, southern Québec had its first breeding records at two sites, plus six scattered birds. Well to the south, western North Carolina

had a wanderer at the Biltmore Estate near Asheville, and similar records come from western Virginia in recent summers. In the Midwest, Sandhill Cranes nested near Magee Marsh, Ohio, very unusual in the western Lake Erie basin, and the state saw 16 nests, a record, while four cranes in Missouri was above average. Northeastern Iowa's small population is said to be expanding, and Nebraska had a scattered few nesters and lingerers. North Dakota, where the last confirmed nesting was in 1993, had four active pairs this year, with at least two successful nests. And on the West Coast, the small Washington

population reached a new high of 58 birds, plus wanderers in the Willamette Valley and 11 on Sauvie Island. While it is difficult to account for all of these range expansions, a plausible explanation is that a decline in hunting pressure on cranes, coupled with a half-century of improvements in wetland and some upland habitats, has allowed the species to increase and to expand into former parts of range, some not occupied in centuries, some probably never before.

Clay-colored Sparrow, like Sandhill Crane, appears to be making modest range expansions in several directions. Upstate New York, where the species was once considered quite rare, held 33 at Fort Drum alone, and



Wyoming, Cattaraugus, and Allegany, and Schoharie Counties had many more. To the north, in Ontario, singles at Rondeau Provincial Park and in the Toronto area were locally rare, as was one in Oxford County, Maine. Most notably, the Massachusetts Military Reservation had 4 or 5 singing males and at least one nest with young—one of few breeding confirmations of the species in New England anywhere. Atlassing work in Ohio keep turning up more Clay-colored, Pennsylvanians continue to define the eastern edge of the species range (this season at Philipsburg), and healthy numbers were reported at the edge of range, e.g., Abitibi, Québec. Outliers, often expected with expanding species, were on the Hudson Bay at Churchill, Manitoba and in northern New Brunswick at St. Leonards, singing away.

### Flirtations: range edges

Sometimes, just a short hop across an international border is enough to warrant boldface type in this journal, even when only a few miles' expansion is involved. In eastern Panama, small numbers of Large-billed Seed-Finches and Yellow-hooded Blackbirds were found, not far from known populations in Colombia but nonetheless both new species for the American Ornithologists' Union's check-list area for North America. But, really, who cares if there is an element of the arbitrary in our self-congratulations on finding a new international, national, state, or local record?! We humans enjoy a sporting element in our pursuit of knowledge, and indeed many records of birds at, or beyond, their ranges' edges would not be made without our mixture of curiosity and determination. I often wonder, when reading about new birds discovered in remote or little-birded areas, "What on earth were the finders doing there?" The record that stands out in summer 2007 in this context was the discovery of nesting Black Rosy-Finches in the Snowy Range of Albany County, in southern Wyoming. Granted, the species nests about 350 km away, in the northern part of the state, but to find a new nesting station so close to Colorado will surely galvanize that state's birders to saddle up for some backcountry work, in hopes of adding a new breeding species to the state list! The same is surely true of Washington's first nesting Northern Hawk Owls near Winthrop, Okanogan County, which raised four owlets.

Not every such discovery takes an off-the-beaten track approach. Close attention to local wetlands produced a new nesting record for

Idaho on 11 July—a family of Horned Grebes in Boundary. In the Pocono Mountains of Pike County, Pennsylvania, careful follow-up of what appeared to be lingering Merlins made it clear that the birds were nesting, and indeed they raised four young birds. This site is roughly 100 km from another nest site in the state, at Eagles Mere in the northeast in Sullivan County. Summer Merlins have turned out to be nesting in upstate New York, and summering Merlins have turned up in Ohio, Virginia, North Carolina and adjacent states with increasing frequency. This expansion closely follows the movement of nesting Merlins into suburban and urban areas of the Midwest and northern Great Plains. The Pocono birds are the southernmost nesters known anywhere; but could the mountains of Maryland or West Virginia shelter a pair or two?

Montane areas, in fact, seem to offer some of the best opportunities to expand our understanding of breeding avifauna at the state level. Swainson's Thrushes breed sparingly south through the Appalachian Mountains of western Virginia, but this season, six singing males spent the summer in North Carolina at famed Mount Mitchell—an excellent opportunity to add a new breeding species to the state's avifauna in coming seasons! In the same state, Yellow-rumped Warblers were noted at high elevations at Roan Mountain and in the Great Smoky Mountains (both in North Carolina and Tennessee), and though possibly just solitary males casting about in search of a mate, these birds could easily be pioneers of new southerly breeding stations. A bird of similar habitats, Winter Wren was confirmed nesting for the first time in South Dakota in Lawrence County, and two were noted on territory in the Hocking Hills area of Ohio, where unknown as nesters. In Pennsylvania, a pair raised four young at Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center, Northampton County, at low elevation and rather far south in that state. Even more remarkable in Pennsylvania was a territorial Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Parker Dam State Park, Clearfield County—hundreds of kilometers south of the southernmost nesting site known for this species, in the Adirondacks of New York. In Indiana, the state's first summering Golden-crowned Kinglet was a singing male at Beverly Shores, Porter County. Although these kinglets were apparently mateless, such birds should be monitored closely when found, as small pockets of appropriate habitat could support a breeding pair or even disjunct population, as with Red-breasted Nuthatch (Iowa's fourth through sixth nesting records were documented this season). Birds

prone to wandering in search of food sources, such as some nuthatches, waxwings, and finches, sometimes turn up well out of range and stay to breed. Mississippians documented their state's third nesting of Cedar Waxing 1 July near Adaton, and Louisianans saw American Goldfinches attending a feeder in Lafayette as late as 21 June, probably indicative of a local breeding population that has yet to be documented. Louisiana also had a potentially nesting Blue-winged Warbler (Figure 2).

Among seabirds, too, there are many unanswered questions about breeding status. The sharp rise in the number of Manx Shearwaters recorded off the Pacific Northwest leads Steve Mlodinow, David Irons, and Bill Tweit to wonder about local breeding: "Perhaps the question should be 'How many Manx are nesting?' rather than 'Are Manx nesting?'" In the same region, Ancient Murrelets, suspected of nesting in Washington for some time, were detected in very high numbers over the season there (117 adults, 18+ chicks) in the waters around the Olympic Peninsula, plus nine in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. The editorial team notes that these records are "consistent with breeding chronology in the Queen Charlotte Islands, the nearest large colony, where fledging occurs primarily in June, followed by rapid dispersal." Two Ancient Murrelets off Yachats, Oregon and a high total of 38 for the season off California, however, were probably not indicative of a range expansion or southward exploration but instead part of a widespread California influx of northerly alcids that included over 214 Horned Puffins, 2 Thick-billed Murres, and a Parakeet Auklet, plus elevated numbers of locally breeding alcids such as Tufted Puffin and Rhinoceros Auklet in inshore waters. Washington also had five Horned Puffins and a rare Parakeet Auklet. The reasons for such an incursion are unclear, but prey scarcity is probably a good guess. The most recent such spring/summer incursion was in 1975.

### Outliers

When summering birds are found more than 100 or 200 kilometers from the edge of known breeding range, careful scrutiny is usually needed to determine whether the birds are attempting to nest in the area or whether they are failed breeders, wanderers, early migrants, or "other." In the case of two pairs of nesting Ross's Gulls in Nunavut in July, nests were observed—a red-letter triumph! The location given in Cameron Eckert's report—"near Bathurst Island"—is charmingly vague (Bathurst itself covers





Figure 2. Although the bulk of range expansions documented in the Lower 48 states over the past 20 years have been northward movements, some species are clearly pushing southward. Strongly suggesting nesting well south of the known breeding distribution was this adult female Blue-winged Warbler captured at a MAPS station at Sherburne Wildlife Management Area, St. Martin Parish, Louisiana on 22 June 2007. Photograph by Michael A. Seymour.

16,042 km<sup>2</sup>), surely because the last documented nest of the species in North America was stolen by a European egg collector as the nest's night watchman had his back turned to make a cup of tea. The species has been documented as nesting in nearby Greenland. Also in the Northern Canada report, a pair of adult Whooping Cranes was observed at Loche Lake, Northwest Territories, more than 200 kilometers from the nearest nesting areas. How amazing it would be to have discovered a new nucleus of breeding activity in this critically endangered species.

In the Lower 48 states, where we must usually settle for less-flashy fare than Ross's Gulls and Whooping Cranes on our Breeding Bird Survey routes, we sometimes hit pay dirt with wetlands birds, both in "wet" years, when ephemeral wetlands are abundant, and in "dry" years, when reliable wetland habitats are few, concentrating birds and narrowing our search. American Bittern is a species known as a spotty, sporadic breeder south of typical range, as recent records of nesters and single birds on the Texas coast underscore. Most of us forget to look for them in summer, though the sight of their Don-King-crowned nestlings is a jolly birding experience. I was reminded of the remote possibility of their breeding when I saw one while I was driving to work, the bittern flying "all businesslike" across the highway at scenic Treherneville, Virginia on 15 June. A canvas of regional re-

ports shows that other errant singles were in Franklin County, West Virginia 5 July; in Goldsboro 2 June and in Martin County, North Carolina 18 July; at Carters Lake, Georgia 18 June; at Mount Pleasant, South Carolina 30 June; at Hoover, through 20 July, at Killbuck 1 June, and in Washington County, Ohio 6 July; at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico 27-28 July; and at Red Slough, Oklahoma, six birds through the season. In similar habitats, summering Soras and Wilson's Snipe often raise hopes of local breeding, and such occurrences appear to be more frequent in recent years than in the 1980s, for instance, perhaps because observers are more attuned to wetland birds and their vocalizations and behaviors. In the flooded Oklahoma and Nebraska fields, Soras were found well south of usual nesting areas, taking advantage of additional habitat (and probably remaining to breed), while in rice fields at the Tidewater Research farm near Roper, North Carolina, Soras and other rails were found in July. Sora is only an occasional breeder in northern Virginia and is not known to have nested in North Carolina. The possibility that these birds were early migrants is worth considering; perhaps another season's scrutiny will provide more insight. Wilson's Snipe in mid-June in Boone County, Indiana may have been nesting and were among a very high count of 13 tallied statewide. Also in Indiana, albeit in different wetland context,

a Common Merganser was seen in June and July on Lake Monroe, only the sixth in summer for the state, and others were in Will County, Illinois and Columbiana County, Ohio (where nesters were noted in 2001). A spree of southerly nestings in this species (Maryland, District of Columbia) suggests that lingering individuals should be watched closely for evidence of nesting.

Every bit as secretive a nester as a rail or bittern, Sharp-shinned Hawks turn up in scattered locations across the continent in summer, though rather rarely in areas where breeding is unknown. Delaware had its first-ever breeding record this summer, at the Ashland Nature Center, New Castle County—an outstanding discovery on the coastal plain. For the third consecutive year, in both locations, the species nested at Southern Pines, North Carolina and Ipswich, Massachusetts. Other summer singles were at Mount Pleasant, South Carolina 12 June, in Warren County, Missouri 6 June, in St. Louis County, Missouri 10 July, in Polk County, Iowa 31 July, and at Camp Bullis, Bexar County, Texas 23-24 June. Ages were not reported, but probably any of these records could pertain to breeding birds; *Accipiter* nests can be tricky to find, particularly that of Sharp-shinned, but patience and practice can produce surprising results, even if not those intended! Stumbling on a nest of Long-eared Owl, for instance, could be one's unexpected reward. This species, whose nesting habits are rarely observed (at least in the East), was heard in Monroe County, Ohio 16 June, and nesters were found in Dudleyville, Arizona and four new sites (since the spring) in New Mexico. The regular rains in the Southwest over the previous year apparently allowed vegetation (and rodent populations) to rebound a bit from the severe drought of the past decade, and so the owls have responded by staying to breed.

### Wildcards?

We often think of birds found well out of breeding range, and especially habitat, as having zero chance to breed, and that's almost always the case. Take the report of an American Tree Sparrow from California's Farallon Islands on 1 June. On the face of it, this would seem as absurd a record as the Common Redpoll found 13 June on the Bolivar Peninsula of Texas. But a check of records (see the respective regional reports) indicated that both records have precedence. American Tree Sparrows have been recorded on the Farallones sixteen times in May/June in the past (half in each month), and in fact, these are the only records from that

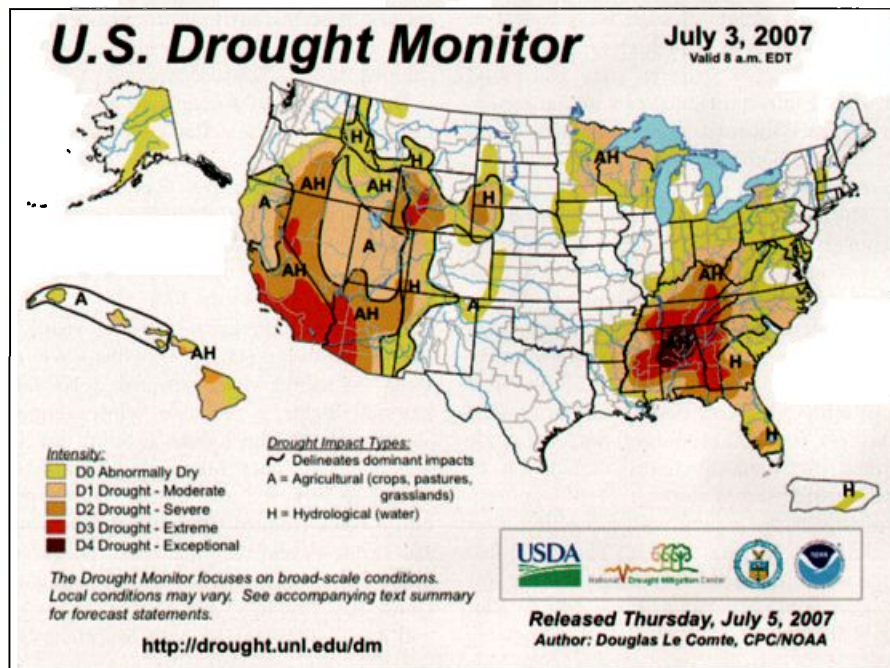


season in the state! The energetic Northern California regional editors did further research and could turn up only five other June records (Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota) from the Lower 48 states at all. The redpoll, which also seems a red herring, is in fact the second for the Upper Texas Coast—and the other record was also from June.

What are the contexts or causes of such appearances? The broader context for the sparrow should be records of other northern-nesting sparrows well south of range, and there certainly are similar records, often from coastal locations (probably because of the vagrant-concentrating power of coastlines), for Harris's, White-crowned, and White-throated Sparrows. A White-crowned Sparrow that sang all summer in Greece, New York 25 June was unusual so late in the season; singles at Moose River Plains, in New York's Adirondacks 13 June and in Northampton County, Pennsylvania 6 June were probably late migrants. One (subspecies unreported) on Ontario's Amherst Island 14 July and an adult Gambel's in Pamlico County, North Carolina the same day were even more bizarre. The only other Gambel's reported were in Portal, Arizona (through 17 June) and Santa Cruz County, Arizona (through 14 July). Several states have been conducting atlas projects in recent nesting seasons, and most of them have discovered that White-crowned, and even more so White-throated, Sparrows linger more commonly than had been thought, especially at the latitude of Pennsylvania and Ohio. The usual explanation for such birds' presence is that they are in some way impaired in terms of their migratory or breeding fitness, and this may be true. But given the leaps and bounds in southerly nestings noted above, perhaps we should not discount all of these birds as potential breeders—with kindly exceptions for birds like the offshore American Tree Sparrows.

### Early exodus?

Redpolls, too, might not be nesting on the Texas coast in the near future, but there is a plausible explanation for why one might turn up there in June. Beginning in June, several groups of Common Redpoll, with young in tow, turned up along the southern shores of the Saint Lawrence River in Québec, possibly indicative of a southwestward shift in breeding range or possibly indicative of early post-breeding wanderlust. Though June seems a strange time for a "fall" migrant, late June and early July can be the time to look for other early northern nesters, such as Red Crossbill,



**Figure 3.** Regular monitoring of The Drought Monitor, available online, can help birders understand short-term shifts in bird distribution. For instance, the midsummer's incursion of southern waders into Missouri and the range shifts of Brewer's, Sage, and Black-chinned Sparrows might have been predicted (or at least interpreted) using maps showing the terrible drought conditions in the Southeast and West. Cross-referencing these maps with eBird-generated maps of real-time records can be a novel way to plan one's birding weekend. *Map courtesy of The Drought Monitor.*

at backyard feeders across the northern Lower 48 and even farther south. Conceivably, the Texas redpoll just went a lot farther south than usual, until it hit the coast, but was "done" with breeding by then. In the Southern Great Plains regional report, Joe Grzybowski and Ross Silcock observe: "Temporally odd records of Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Black-throated Green Warblers, and Northern Waterthrush this season lead one to wonder whether early warming on northern breeding grounds is allowing single-brooded species to begin fall migration extraordinarily early." Perhaps this was also the case with the extraordinary adult female Snow Bunting in Rockland County, New York 20-25 June (the only summer record from the state)? Or the 20 Eastern Kingbirds at Big Cypress Natural Preserve, Collier County, Florida 12 July—five weeks ahead of typical schedule? Or the very early push of many Tennessee Warblers in southern Québec in late June? Or the mid-June flight of Red-breasted Nuthatches in coastal lowlands of New York, New Jersey, and Delaware? The Midwest had a few lingering early June Red-breasteds, and the "fall" flight commenced in late July, as is typical, though one in Boone County, Indiana 6 July was the state's fourth ever in that month. Though a shift in breeding phenology is plau-

sible, another explanation for these early migrants is that they encountered food or habitat trouble on the nesting grounds and abandoned breeding efforts, rather than finishing earlier than usual. The Québec regional editors report that extensive defoliation of Trembling Aspen occurred across large areas where Tennessee Warblers nest, and that this may have triggered the early exodus.

### Drought-driven

From the chaparral and coastal sage scrub of southern California to the parched sagebrush deserts of eastern Washington, drought had a tremendous impact on many western passerines of xeric habitats (Figure 3). In southern California, Bell's Sage Sparrows in Los Angeles County showed essentially zero reproductive success and indeed had almost disappeared by the middle of May. Brewer's Sparrows likewise vanished from their haunts in the Pacific Northwest, only to turn up in numbers in northern Idaho, "defending territories in clearcut forests, riparian areas, and weedy patches," according to Trochlell. In Washington, Brewer's appeared in extralimital settings in early June, "inexplicably set[ting] up territories in grasslands and open dry coniferous woodlands devoid of sage," according to Mlodinow, Irons, and Tweit, and by the end of



the season, dozens of such birds had been documented, even at high elevations. Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows were also found displaced into strange habitats in that region, while Black-throated Sparrows turned up out of range in both Oregon and Washington, almost certainly driven by drought.

The long-distance stars of this rather disastrous set of displacements was certainly Lawrence's Goldfinch, documented near Datil, New Mexico from 19 July into August (one male; where very rare), in 15 locations in Arizona (where erratic and normally found in winter), and in Lemon Canyon 5 June—this pair a first for Sierra County, California. The farthest traveled, however, was the male found in Grand Junction, Colorado on 23 May, which stayed through 24 July and apparently reared young with a female Lesser Goldfinch (see Frontispiece). Though probably no one would have cast a vote for Lawrence's Goldfinch, a near-endemic nester in California, for Colorado's next nesting

species, it seems anything can happen in a state that has a nesting record of White-rumped Hawk (albeit also a mixed pair).

On the topic of star-crossed species, we read in this issue of a Ross's Goose × Snow Goose hybrid in southeastern Arizona; a male Mallard × Cinnamon Teal hybrid at Natural Bridges State Beach, California; a male Blue-winged Teal × Northern Shoveler hybrid at Whitewater Lake, Manitoba; a mixed pair of Cattle Egret and Little Blue Heron (with young!) at Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota; a Glossy Ibis × White-faced Ibis hybrid where expected, at Nebraska's Salt Plains; a probable White-rumped Sandpiper × Dunlin hybrid at South Beach, Massachusetts (hey Marshall, please send photos to Sully!); a male Lucifer Hummingbird × Black-chinned Hummingbird in western Texas; a handsome male Blackpoll Warbler × Bay-breasted Warbler hybrid singing in Goose Bay, Labrador; and hybrids of Indigo and Lazuli Buntings in both Saskatchewan

and Oregon (!). Texas birders have had to do quite a bit of research to document regular hybridization of Virginia's Warblers and Colima Warblers in their state, and this summer, their pet Yellow-throated Warbler in the Davis Mountains Preserve, present for another season, has switched its song to that of Grace's Warbler. Will wonders never cease?

### Odds and ends

I will leave it to the reader to hunt on his or her own for this season's Western Reef-Heron, Eurasian Siskin, and Lanceolated Warblers. Whatever the past history of the birds in question, I personally took great delight in reading of Superb Starling in Freetown, Massachusetts and Northern Carmine Bee-eater at Saint-Ferdinand, Québec in June. These birds mean that someone was out birding in June, a month that some of us slackers assume is unshocking. Get out there and sweat and do those B.B.S. routes! You never know when a bitter or bee-eater will fly by.



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