

Fort Drum Natural Resources



Wildlife Viewing Report – 19 April 2018

Birds

Back in early March when we last published a wildlife viewing report it looked like we were in store for an early bird migration, thanks mostly to a late February warm spell that brought large numbers of blackbirds, robins, waterfowl, Killdeer and other early spring migrants northward at unusually early dates. Unfortunately, stubbornly cold temperatures reestablished themselves, and migration has been very sluggish since, with birds trickling in slowly and few significant migration events. As of 19 April several species of bird that normally arrive in numbers by 15 April remained scarce or had not been detected at all. However, it is not clear whether some of these birds really aren't here or have arrived but escaped the attention of observers in the field.

On the night of April 12-13 there was a significant movement of birds in northern New York, but this was followed by several days of snow, sleet, freezing rain, heavy rain, and high winds, conditions not suitable for finding birds. Field work after the worst of this miserable weather ended suggests that Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and several species of sparrows arrived during the night of 12-13 April. Most conspicuous by their absence or scarcity are Pine Warbler and Chipping Sparrow, two species that normally arrive around 12 April but remain virtually absent on Fort Drum as of 19 April.

Waterfowl were the most conspicuous migrants throughout most of this period, although for much of March persistent ice prevented many ducks from using ponds on the installation. As soon as ice was out Ring-necked Ducks started appearing on ponds throughout Fort Drum, with a smattering of other species scattered about. Five Northern Shovelers at Matoon Marsh in TA17B on 30 March were relatively unusual for Fort Drum. Unprecedented on Fort Drum was a Trumpeter Swan seen on the Indian River and later on the same date at Matoon Marsh. Trumpeter Swans nest at Perch River Wildlife Management Area in Jefferson County and at a few other sites in northern New York, and thanks to a reintroduction effort in Ontario are increasing throughout the region, so the appearance of this swan on Fort Drum was not unexpected. A swan seen on 4 April along FUSA Boulevard may have been this same Trumpeter Swan or perhaps a different individual wandering around looking for a mate.



Trumpeter Swan on the Indian River in Training Area 17 on 30 March 2018.

The only other unusual sighting this period was of a Sandhill Crane migrating over TA12. There are only a handful of crane sightings for Fort Drum, but this species is likely going to become much more regular in the future. Until the early 2000s Sandhill Cranes occurred in New York strictly as a migrant, but the first breeding pair was found in central New York in 2003, and over the subsequent decade breeding pairs colonized locations throughout the state, including sites in Jefferson and St. Lawrence Counties. If current trends continue, in the future Sandhill Cranes will be seen regularly on and near Fort Drum at least as a migrant and maybe even as a breeder.

Weather has been very poor for migration for nearly all of April, but the weather forecast indicates a change is coming, with temperatures forecast to reach 60 degrees on 23 or 24 April. A strong warm front following a sustained period of cold weather could produce a very large wave of migrant songbirds. Based on the timing of this predicted warm-up, expect to see large numbers of Barn Swallow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Pine Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and several species of sparrow arrive. This migratory wave should begin a period that will see the arrival of new species of bird virtually every day for several weeks, leading to the peak of spring migration in mid-May.

Species observed on Fort Drum from 2 March - 12 April 2018:

Snow Goose	Osprey	White-breasted Nuthatch
Canada Goose	Bald Eagle	Brown Creeper
Trumpeter Swan	Northern Harrier	Golden-crowned Kinglet
Wood Duck	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Eastern Bluebird
American Wigeon	Cooper's Hawk	American Robin
Northern Shoveler	Red-shouldered Hawk	European Starling
Mallard	Red-tailed Hawk	Cedar Waxwing
American Black Duck	Rough-legged Hawk	House Sparrow
Northern Pintail	Snowy Owl	House Finch
Green-winged Teal	Barred Owl	Purple Finch
Ring-necked Duck	Belted Kingfisher	Red Crossbill
Bufflehead	Red-headed Woodpecker	Pine Siskin
Hooded Merganser	Downy Woodpecker	American Goldfinch
Common Merganser	Hairy Woodpecker	American Tree Sparrow
Ring-necked Pheasant	Northern Flicker	Chipping Sparrow
Ruffed Grouse	Pileated Woodpecker	Field Sparrow
Wild Turkey	American Kestrel	Vesper Sparrow
Pied-billed Grebe	Merlin	Fox Sparrow
Rock Pigeon	Eastern Phoebe	Song Sparrow
Mourning Dove	Northern Shrike	Swamp Sparrow
Sandhill Crane	Blue Jay	White-throated Sparrow
Killdeer	American Crow	Dark-eyed Junco
Ring-billed Gull	Common Raven	Eastern Meadowlark
Herring Gull	Horned Lark	Red-winged Blackbird
Common Loon	Tree Swallow	Brown-headed Cowbird
Great Blue Heron	Black-capped Chickadee	Common Grackle
Turkey Vulture	Red-breasted Nuthatch	Northern Cardinal