

October 2020 Sightings Report

It was a quiet, average month. Temperatures averaged 50.9 °F, 0.3° above normal. The month started cool, with a passing storm system to end the first week, then turned milder with ideal weather to enjoy fall colors, and on to peak at a record high of 80° on the 23rd. A sharp cold front passed late in that day, and cooler temperatures and scattered showers dominated the last week, with a few snow flurries and the first hard frost of the season on the final day. Precipitation at 2.76" was just 0.04" above normal. There was only a trace of snow on the 31st. Nine straight days of some rainfall from October 19-27 set a new record for the month. There were no major precipitation events, and even winds were below normal.

The species total for the month set a new record high for an October. All regularly expected species were reported, with only some almost regulars and hoped-for species missed, like: passing phalaropes, Little Gull, and a number of species for which the tail end of their departure just hits October. Shorebird variety was good at 20 species and warblers at 26 species. There was only one record late departure and 7 more passerines at dates beyond the old Monroe County Checklist distributions, but with later records in the intervening years. The eBird records downloaded this month for the region totaled 36,589, more than double last year's download. Probably, the better weather this year was a positive, but lack of a New York State Ornithological Association meeting here was still a factor. Possibly, restricted travels due to COVID-19 had more birders out more locally. At the Braddock Bay Bird Observatory banding station, the number of new bands was up by about 75% from last year. Again, interesting changes to ponder.

Most of the expected waterfowl were reported, though generally at relatively low numbers, other than single large counts for Canada Goose and Northern Pintail. Diving ducks were noted only in relatively low peak counts. There were no real misses. Greater White-fronted Goose, Cackling Goose, and Harlequin Duck were the only relatively rarer species.

From pheasants through Sandhill Crane, all of the expected species were reported, mostly in typical numbers and departure dates. The Red-necked Grebe maximum was at the somewhat higher count of 86, typical of recent years. No large Chimney Swift gatherings were noted into this month, and as usual, the goatsuckers were not reported. Rails were scarce, and gallinule and coot numbers were low in the Northern Montezuma Wildlife Management Area due to reduced habitat with easy access. The peak American Coot count was 300 at Braddock Bay. The now-expected gathering of Sandhill Cranes in the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge complex reached 70 in a count in our region; more next month.

An OK 20 shorebird species were reported. Numbers were low, other than a few counts of Dunlin. Lake Ontario water levels reached the point where there were some mudflats in the bays, and many of the reports came

from the area around the barrier beach island at the mouth of Braddock Bay. Sightings of 1-3 Hudsonian Godwits for the first half of the month plus, and the arrival of Purple Sandpipers at month's end garnered the most birder attention. A few species sometimes continuing into this month were missed, with no phalarope reports probably the closest to a bit surprising.

The jaegers continued to put on a good show along the lakeshore following September's large numbers. At least 14 Parasitic Jaegers, one adult Long-tailed Jaeger, and one jaeger species were reported. With passing Bona-parté's Gulls relatively scarce, missing Little Gull was not a big surprise. Two different Laughing Gulls were reported and photographed. The now-expected Lesser Black-backed Gulls were well reported, but there were no early white-winged gulls. Terns were present to expected departure dates in small numbers.

The loon movement was on the low side; peak numbers were also low. Among the herons, egrets, and allies, a nice surprise was the region's third **White-faced Ibis** found by Sheryl Gracewski and Tom Nash on Salmon Creek, inland from Braddock Bay on the 7th, and seen and photographed by many others. There was also a flyby *Plegadis* ibis species off Greece on the 23rd.

The fall raptor picture was again weak. There were no reports for Black Vulture, Northern Goshawk, or Broad-winged Hawk, and few Red-shouldered Hawks. Rough-legged Hawk was reported from 4 locations on and after the 23rd. Again skipping forward, all 3 regular falcons were again well reported this fall.

This year, the owls produced some surprises. Early note of a Northern Saw-whet Owl in the Owl Woods prompted an organized count, with 11 found by month's end (and more in November). And a banding effort at the BBBO area caught 25 Northern Saw-whet Owls from October, 5-21 with a maximum of 18 banded on the 21st. Also, a Barred Owl has taken up residence in that area and has become very tolerant of people. **Unfortunately, too many visitors have taken advantage of that and have forgotten the ethics part of their avocation.** In addition, the first Short-eared Owls of the season were reported on the 10th. Red-headed Woodpecker reports were scarce again, hopefully mostly an effort issue; ticked earlier by most listers and sites not high priority at this time of year for those looking for new birds.

Again, essentially all the expected passerine species were reported; only Bobolink might be considered almost regular into October and missed; any others iffy. Numbers were better for many species and more than usual continued to October departures. Eight passerines were reported at dates beyond the latest in the 1984 Monroe County Checklist, but all had been reported previously at later dates since then, except for a record late Mourning Warbler seen and photographed by Greg Lawrence on the 17th. Among the banding data were 9 species with numbers banded more than 2 standard deviations from their prior 9-year averages; all were increases: Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos;

Black-capped Chickadee; Swainson’s Thrush; Worm-eating Warbler (only 2); Cape May, Bay-breasted, and Blackburnian Warblers; and Purple Finch. Also high were: Gray-cheeked Thrush (after a couple of low years), Blackpoll Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow. Attempts at statistical comparisons give one a chance to think about jumping to conclusions with numbers and “statistics”. The variance around most of the banding averages or departures dates, if one tries that, are large, so almost no changes seem significant. Biological systems are difficult to study; too many little understood variables. By month’s end, nearly all our irregular winter finches had been reported and in decent numbers, and we will add the rest in November. Nelson’s Sparrows were the only scarcer species in that family, found at Burger Park, the Braddock Bay barrier beach, and Buck Pond. Among the 26 species of warblers reported, 15 Orange-crowned (none banded), a Connecticut banded on the 1st, and the record late Mourning were of special note. A **Dickcissel** found and photographed by Terry Bohling in Livonia ends this October list.

Please submit reports to eBird, post them on geneseebirds, and/or send them by the 5th of the month to Andrea Patterson, 144 Greystone Lane, #24, Rochester, NY 14618.

	2020	2019	10-year Average (2010-2019)
Total species for October	219	194	203.5
New species for the year	5	3	5.1
Total for the year to date	287	287	286.1

Bob Spahn and the RBA Records Committee

Observers: Jim Adams, Susan Alexander, Osvaldo Araya, Kevin Armstrong, BBBO (Andrea Patterson), Jessie Barry, Jim Barry, Katelyn Barry, Mitchell Barry, Doug Beattie, Don & Gillian Bemont, Linda Clark Benedict, Steve Benedict, Mike Bergin, Lynn Bergmeyer, Barry Bermudez, John Boettcher, Terry Bohling, Lynn

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A Hudsonian Godwit at the East Spit of Braddock Bay. Photo by Jay Greenberg.