

OFFSHORE NOCTURNAL MIGRATION OF WARBLERS, HERONS, AND SHOREBIRDS NO. 2 (1992)

I have recorded in *Cassinia* Volume 64 (1990-1991, pp 28,29) observations of nocturnal migration of birds at Hudson Canyon in the Atlantic Ocean. This is an update of another trip on which a similar flight appeared.

It was on September 27, 1992, while in transit to Hudson Canyon from Barnegat Light, New Jersey, that Edward Manners and I were fortunate to witness another landbird, shorebird, and heron flight in just about the same location as before, stretching from 50 to 80 miles off shore. I had not expected such a flight because the weather was in great contrast to the sparkling clear night of two years previous. This was a night of torrential rains, strong enough, I thought, to swamp any bird trying to fly. Not so. The weather map showed a high slipping off New England earlier that day, apparently triggering another offshore flight of warblers, shorebirds, and herons.

Both Manners and I were bedded down in weather-protected spots on the outside upper deck and could see all the action in the ship's lights. We were about 55 miles from shore at 0230 when the rain began falling or I should say pelting as it came forcefully down and I noticed warblers flying across the deck. Manners had been seeing some birds a few miles before this, but now the scattered birds began to turn into swarms of birds. Interspersed with the warblers that were crazily flying in all directions were tight flocks of shorebirds, some Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) calling loudly as they flashed by, and groups of 50 or 60 Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*), also calling, zoomed in and out of the lights. Large flocks of peeps were visible on occasion as they too passed alongside the boat. A Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*) approached the boat from the stern, and a Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) drifted into our light. Some "skews" of Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*) penetrated the roar of the rain storm. Not one bird landed aboard. Only one Greater Yellowlegs made an attempt to settle on the deck, but changed its mind and took off before touching down. The identity of the warblers could not be certified, but even though they were seen in much poorer circumstances than on the previous flight, all appeared to have plain, light-gray underparts and were similar to the Blackpoll Warblers (*Dendroica striata*) formerly experienced.

The rains finally stopped just before dawn, at which time we scanned the sky and water, but no trace of these birds could be seen. It was as though we had come through a dream and with the dawn the dream had disappeared. All the birds apparently survived the storm and resumed their course, disappearing shortly before sunup. Numerous Pomarine Jaegers (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) were near the boat; we counted 65 individuals during the day, but none was seen feeding near us early in the morning, indicating no floating bird carcasses on the surface. The voraciousness of the jaegers was seen when the entrails of a tuna fish was thrown overboard and 16 Pomarine Jaegers appeared in less than a minute to tear it apart.

The weather maps of October 14-15, 1990, and of September 26-27, 1992, point to similar weather patterns on these two flights. They show a high pressure front pushing off the New England coast the night before the flight.

Just where these families joined and why fast flying shorebirds would choose to fly with slower warblers and herons adds to the puzzle.

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