

REGIONAL REPORTS

HIGHLIGHTS DEC. 1 to MAR. 31

Many water and land birds were seen later in the fall, earlier in the spring and through the winter. An unusually good reproductive season in June and July 1953 and the lack of prolonged snow cover during the winter may partially explain the situation.

Northern species found an hospitable wintering area in New York this season. A few Goshawks and Rough-legged Hawks were seen. Both Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were seen frequently near Buffalo, Cayuga Lake, near Oswego and Albany. Snowy Owls were reported from all areas except regions seven and eight. They seemed most common in region five where forty birds were seen. Saw-whet Owls were seen in small numbers in regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10. Gray Shrikes were seen in all regions except six. Most reporters called it a good flight year and Buffalo reported the best flight in many years. Arctic Three-toed Woodpeckers were seen again near Rochester and Buffalo. Purple Finches and Goldfinches seemed to be the predominant finches of the Southern Tier and the Adirondacks where they feasted on the abundant birch and hemlock seed crops. Siskins, Evening Grosbeaks, and the two crossbills were present but not in great numbers. Snow Buntings were reported in large flocks in the more open agricultural areas south of Lake Ontario but in small flocks elsewhere. The only regions not reporting them were regions six and seven.

Mourning Doves and Meadowlarks wintered successfully in above average numbers. Baltimore Orioles (normally wintering in Central America) were reported at three feeders in central and eastern New York. Seven species of warblers were seen during the winter from various areas.

The carolinian invasion continued and held ground already gained. Tufted Titmice were reported regularly south of Lake Ontario and the Mohawk River. A Bewick's Wren was seen in Auburn, N. Y., and Mockingbirds were reported from near Rochester, Geneva and Ithaca. Carolina Wrens seemed to winter well and Dickcissels were seen in regions three and nine during the winter.

Three rare western species were reported. Bohemian Waxwings were seen at Rochester and in Sullivan Co. A Black-headed Grosbeak was seen at Katonah and another probable wintered at Idlewild. An immature Golden-crowned Sparrow was seen at Jones Beach.

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

The lowest point in Region One is the Lake Ontario shore line, 246 ft. above sea level. From a rather high embankment here, the land slopes very gently upward toward the south. This is the Ontario Plain, approximately ten miles wide. It ends at the Niagara Escarpment, which parallels the Lake Ontario shore. Southward from the Niagara Escarpment is the Huron Plain, about 600 ft. above sea level. The Huron Plain is narrow, being in turn terminated to the south by the Onondaga Escarpment, which stretches from North Buffalo to a point just north of Batavia, and beyond. The Erie Plain, the southernmost of the three narrow steps up to the Allegheny Plateau, averages some 750 ft. in altitude. It is irregularly shaped; on it are located Buffalo, Batavia, Alden, East Aurora, Orchard Park, and Hamburg,

as well as Silver Creek, Dunkirk, Fredonia, and Westfield along the south shore of Lake Erie. The Portage Escarpment to the south of the Erie Plain rises as the northern limit of the Allegheny uplands, which thus occupy somewhat more than half of our territory. This southern, hilly portion contains rolling land, gradually reaching higher altitudes which culminate in our highest point of 2548 ft. (Alma Hill) near Pikeville, Allegany County.

Thus, by reason of great differences in altitude, western New York presents a reverse picture, with sub-Canadian conditions in the mountains to the south and sub-Carolinian affinities on the lower plains to the north. This phenomenon would readily account for the presence of northern species in the southern tier of counties, but is insufficient in itself to explain the presence of some of our southern species on the two northern plains. To understand this, we must appreciate the part played by the portion of the Erie Plains which follows the entire northern shore line of Lake Erie from Detroit to Fort Erie. Along this important migration and emigration route such species as Cerulean Warbler, Carolina Wren, and Orchard Oriole reach the northern part of our territory.

This northern half of western New York, comprising the three lower plains, is characterized for the most part by urban and suburban areas, open fields, and occasional patches of deciduous woodland in which elms are dominant. Important exceptions are the marshy areas of the great Tonawanda, Oak Orchard (Alabama), and Bergen swamps of the Huron Plain. Aside from these swamps there is little really wild territory in western New York excepting portions of the Allegheny uplands. Here the typical beech-maple-birch association is often augmented by hemlocks, and these higher, cooler forests, cut deeply by creeks and brooks, provide nesting areas for birds both of Canadian and Carolinian affinities.

Lake Chautauqua is the only large lake in western New York, though numerous smaller ones dot the area, these being for the most part confined to the Allegheny foothills. We are extremely fortunate, however, in having as our boundaries two of the Great Lakes and the Niagara River which connects them. These waters are very attractive to ducks, geese, swans, and gulls, and at the same time present natural barriers for shorebirds, hawks, and many species of land birds, which tend to avoid crossing them by following along their shores on both spring and fall migrations. Thus our major city, Buffalo, is situated in the very heart of a particularly fine birding area.

The 1953-1954 winter season gave us a variety of weather and the weather gave us a variety of birds. The total of 91 species for January was, I believe, without precedent. December was very mild, and many of the half-hardy birds were encouraged to remain with us. January was cold, — severe enough to thin these birds out and bring in many interesting visitors from farther north. The cold weather persisted until mid-February, when a protracted spell of mild, spring-like weather brought migrants into western New York in unprecedented numbers. Early March freezes must have seriously embarrassed the geese and ducks, and the twenty inches of snow which covered the northern half of our territory on the 29th of March surprised all the ground-feeding birds. I drove from Buffalo to Rochester on the 30th, and found Killdeer, Prairie Horned Larks, Tree Sparrows, Song Sparrows, and Robins lining the roadsides where the snow plows had bared the ground.

LOONS — DUCKS: Common Loons were reported early — ten on the Genesee River March 14 at Belmont (McMurtry). Two Red-throated Loons December 27 in the Niagara Gorge (Woldman *et al.*). Horned Grebe arrived March 27 at Findlay Lake (Elderkin) and the 29th at Bowangda Club Pond (McMurtry). Pied-billed Grebes actually wintered, though sparingly; migrants appeared from March

10th on. Great Blue Herons wintered at Buckhorn Island and Night Herons in Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo. Migrant Great Blues appeared March 18 and 19. No records of migrant Night Herons or of Bitterns were received. A few swan were reported by the radio to have alighted at Niagara Falls March 1 (very early). Two or three were seen at Buckhorn Island on the 5th and 6th, but as the weather remained cold there were no further reports until the 28th and 29th, when the barometer fell and the snow storm mentioned above broke over the northern counties. Hundreds of swans descended on the lakes and ponds of Allegheny, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua counties. Mrs. McMurtry counted a total of 156 on eight ponds; Mrs. Thompson 26 on Silver lake and two on her own pond; Eaton states "many reported throughout Olean area 28, 29, 30 March"; and Elderkin observed swans on Chautauqua and Findlay Lakes, and saw 60 fly over Jamestown on the 28th. Canada Geese were last reported in 1953 on December 6 (Bird Island, Axtells). Responding to the mild weather in February, they returned very early, one being seen February 20 at Derby (Braunberns), 200 on the 21st at Oak Orchard (Praemassings), and "a large flock" at Wellsville on the 28th (McMurtry). Their numbers increased at Oak Orchard until a peak of 10,000 was reached on March 28. One Snow Goose at Oak Orchard on March 16 was joined by a second on the 27th; a Blue Goose also appeared on the latter date. Gadwalls were last reported January 11 by Schaffner (four at Niagara Falls), and had not returned (as they usually do) before March 31. One European Widgeon was noted by many observers on March 28 at Oak Orchard. Pintails arrived at Wolcottsville on a date which broke all records, — 200 on February 21. Their numbers reached a high of 5,000 there on March 18. Other dabblers arrived on comparatively normal dates. Ring-necked Ducks arrived with February's spring weather (five on the east branch of the river on the 22nd by Axtells), and were reported sparingly throughout March. Canvasbacks came in rapidly in December, and 9,281 were reported on our Christmas Bird Count held January 1. This is normal for recent winters, but such numbers were unknown here a few years back. Redheads were rather well represented in the Scaup and Canvasback flocks on the river and in the harbor. From two to five Harlequin Ducks spent the winter commuting between the Three Sisters Islands and the Horseshoe rapids at the Falls. An Eider (sp.?) was observed at Bird Island December 3 (Schaffner). White-winged were the only scoters reported, and they were almost entirely confined to Lake Ontario, where they apparently wintered in good numbers.

HAWKS - OWLS: Vultures appeared March 22, 24, 27, 28 (normal). Goshawks were not reported in subject period until latter half of March, when three were seen. Rough-legged Hawks were well represented in the northern counties and one at York's Corners January 24 (McMurtry) was a rarity for that district. Bald Eagles continue to maintain their slender toe-hold in usual haunts. Red-shoulders returned early, the first one being reported from Olean February 28 (Eaton). A Virginia Rail, brought to the museum from Lackawanna December 11, was banded by Mrs. Fisk and released at Buckhorn Island, where Gallinules had been seen as late as December 6 (Axtells). A few Coots were noted in December and January, but the first migrant was reported from Lake Chautauqua February 28 (Parker). March's colder weather slowed their migration down and they were not seen in numbers until March 26. Killdeer were most responsive to the spring-like weather of February and were reported many times before the end of the month, from Wellsville (16th, McMurtry) and Jamestown to Youngstown and Oak Orchard. One Woodcock arrived during that period, but was found dead on the 25th (Elma, Byron); otherwise the species' first record was March 14 (Batavia, Mahaney). One Wilson's Snipe wintered at Williamsville, the first migrant being noted on March 19 at Oak Orchard (Mitchell). Four lesser Yellowlegs and four Pectoral Sandpipers were observed at Wolcottsville March 28 (many observers), breaking all records. Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were present rather frequently, but Kumlien's was seen only once. Ring-bills were more numerous than usual throughout the winter, and migrants came in exceptionally early, a flock of 26 being reported at St. Bonaventure on February 26 (Eaton). A very few Bonaparte's Gulls wintered (rare), but migrants were unreported prior to April (late). There was one record of Little Gull. A single Brunnich's Murre was closely studied at the foot of Porter Ave., Buffalo, on March 7 by Brownstein. Snowy Owls were reported very frequently from all areas. Saw-whets were seen twice, once at Wilson January 1 (Klabundes), and one (collected) near Seneca Junction December 13 (Eaton).

SWIFTS - SHRIKES: Unaccountably, Kingfishers did not winter. Mrs. McMurtry reported them throughout March, but elsewhere they did not arrive until the last third of the month. Many Flickers wintered, probable migrants appearing in mid-March. One more Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker was reported, this one at Youngstown from February 7 (Mitchell *et al.*) to 14 (Vaughan, Klabundes). Phoebe, Prairie Horned Larks, and Tree Swallows arrived on the dot. A nice incursion of Titmice was notable in January and February. Many Robins wintered, but we suspect the three reported from Olean on February 27 (Eaton), the six at Scio (McMurtry) and the 30 at Batavia (Mahaney) on the 28th, were our first migrants. Bluebirds wintered at Lewiston (very rare), the first migrants arriving March 4 (Castile, Thompson) and 6 (East Elma, Simmons). It was a remarkable winter for Gray Shrikes, — more records by far than any recent year.

VIREOS - WARBLERS: A Myrtle Warbler was seen from January 6 to February 2 at Lewiston (Klabundes). Migrants arrived first at Batavia (March 19, Annabal).

BLACKBIRDS - SPARROWS: More Meadowlarks than usual wintered, but apparently migrants did not arrive until well into March. Red-wings swarmed the area in February, being reported from no less than eleven places, beginning with two individuals at Dayton on the 16th (Beardslee). Grackles were also reported early, the first record being of two birds near Allegany February 15 (Eaton), 48 Cowbirds being counted in the same flock. Mrs. McMurtry considers Cardinals more numerous in Alleghany County. Redpolls were not reported, but Purple Finches and Pine Siskins were seen in average numbers. Both crossbills were seen, but the only large group reported was one of fifty Red Crossbills near Olean all winter (Eaton). Goldfinches were numerous in the southern counties, seldom reported elsewhere. A Singing Field Sparrow was reported from Grand Island March 27 (Rice). A February 28 Fox Sparrow at Alden (Wolfling) was probably an extremely early migrant. Song Sparrows arrived the first week in March. Longspurs were reported only twice, but Snow Buntings were present in all areas, and most records were of very large flocks.

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REGION 2 — GENESEE

December was 5.8 degrees warmer than average and bays and ponds remained open late into the month. Very little snow fell during the month and an influx of rarities was noted. Rochester reported 76 species on their Christmas Census — an all time high. Weather in January was about normal but February was quite mild, probably accounting for the early waterfowl records. March was quite wintry but nevertheless migrants showed up on time towards the end of the month.

LOONS - DUCKS: Two reports of Holboell's Grebe, one on Dec. 6 and ten migrants on Mar 20 (Paine Beach); six White Pelicans were observed off Shore Acres in Lake Ontario on Mar. 28 (Taylor, Conway) and two Western Grebes were seen on Irondequoit Bay Jan. 3 (Tanghe, Dobson). The last Black-crowned Night Heron and Bitterns were seen on Dec. 12. An immature Gannet was seen at Ling Road Outlet on two week-ends in Dec. Many Canada Geese were seen on Mar. 28 flying west over the Rochester area. It was estimated that 20,000 geese had crossed a north-south line which extended out into the lake and ten miles inland. On the same day Barry saw 13 Blue Geese also flying west. One Snow Goose was seen in Dec. at Hamlin Park. An adult male Harlequin Duck remained from Dec. 20 to Jan. 1 at Ling Road Outlet. Later in January the same or another bird was reported at Webster Beach Park. A female or immature Common Eider was seen on Jan. 24 at Hamlin Park (Barry, Van Beurder). First arrival dates on dabbling ducks included Pintail Mar. 15, American Baldpate Mar. 18, Shoveller Mar. 22, Green-winged Teal Mar. 28, and Gadwall Mar. 28. Two Surf Scoters were reported in 1954 and White-winged Scoters were seen in small numbers.

HAWKS - OWLS: Single Goshawks were seen in Dec. and Feb., possibly the same bird (Listman). A Golden Eagle was seen at Hamlin Park on Mar. 14 (Schaffner, Nathan). The first Turkey Vulture was seen on Mar. 19. A Florida Gallinule was seen at Ling Road in Jan. Last shorebirds of 1953 seen were Killdeer Dec. 5, Greater Yellow-legs Dec. 12, Red-backed Sandpiper Dec. 12 and Wilson's Snipe Dec. 26. No Purple Sandpipers were seen in 1953. The first recorded shorebirds in 1954 were Killdeer Mar. 20, Lesser Yellow-legs Mar. 27, Woodcock Mar. 11, Wilson's Snipe Mar. 20, and Pectoral Sandpiper Mar. 24. Four Saw-whet Owls were reported in 1954 and one Barn Owl Jan. 31 - Mar. 31. There were a few Snowy Owls in the Rochester area.