

REGIONAL REPORTS

HIGHLIGHTS DECEMBER 1955 THROUGH MARCH 1956

This was, as one regional editor put it very well, a rough winter. December was cold in some regions, extremely cold in others. Those in western and southern New York who were bothered by frozen ponds, marshes, rivers and bays should note the 28 day average temperature of -2°F . in the Champlain Region. Some regions witnessed more raw faces than species on Christmas Counts. Snowfall records were set in Regions 3 and 5, and the entire state was blanketed with a heavy mid-March fall. This late blizzard delayed many early migrants and showed evidence in some regions of exacting a toll of those which did arrive on time.

Warblers give perhaps the best evidence of the severity of the early winter cold. Early records are good: a Chat Dec. 1 on Long Island, a Yellow Warbler Dec. 18 at Cortland. But there is only one record of a possible wintering warbler upstate: a Yellow-throat at Rochester (found by a peregrinating Buffalo group. Even southern areas found the Myrtle in only small numbers. Snowy Owls and wintering hawks were also down. Purple Finch populations were very poor in most regions with no build-up in March.

Contrary to expectations herons were reported in five of the eight upstate regions, Wood Ducks in three. A Yellow-crowned Night Heron was found on the waterfowl count on Long Island. Shrike counts were good; Robins surprising. Regions 2, 3, 5, 8 and 9 found Robins in unprecedented numbers. Evening Grosbeaks were state-wide in large numbers; one of the best items of evidence: Sally Hoyt banding over 700. There were good populations of other finches except Purple. Six Towhees evidently wintered in widely scattered parts of the state, and although fluctuations were apparent Snow Bunting populations appeared to be very good.

Other good records: a Kittiwake and late Little Gulls in the Niagara Gorge; a Magpie on Long Island; a Barrow's Golden-eye near Albany.

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

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This was a period of severe winter weather, particularly during the first half. December was the coldest in eleven years and during January the temperature at no time reached 40° . February was a trifle warmer than average, due more to lack of below-zero days than to the presence of warm days; and March was never-ending disappointment to those who were looking for two nice days back-to-back. Early March migrants such as swans, geese, Robins, Red-wings, and Killdeer, were treated to some mighty stiff weather soon after their arrival, and their powers of endurance were severely tested. Difficult to explain in light of this unusually cold winter was the presence of Bonaparte's Gulls on the Niagara River all winter, something which has happened rarely in the past and then only during a very mild win-

ter. Furthermore, wintering Robis were reported everywhere in far greater numbers than usual. Other instances of wintering or late lingering will be found below.

LOONS — DUCKS: Common Loons were last reported 12/11 (Niagara Gorge, Schaffner, Brownstein) and appeared again 3/27 (L. Chautauqua, Elderkin). Horned Grebes were present all winter at Dunkirk. A single Pied-billed Grebe remained at Celeron until 1/15 (Beal). Great Blue Herons had not yet returned to their nesting sites at the end of the period (unusual). A single hardy (or stupid) Amer. Bittern was seen twice in January on Grand Island, the second time on the 22nd (Rathbun, Rew). Whistling Swans returned early, being reported from three places 3/10 and reaching the northern counties by the 12th. Their numbers were small, 39 being the maximum reported from any of seven localities. Canada Geese reached Oak Orchard 3/3, and by the 12th 4700 were reported there. Single Gadwalls were seen in January and February from Grand Island and Goat Island, and one male stayed from 1/21 to 3/26 with the Mallards and Blacks in Forest Lawn Cemetery, Buffalo (Schaffner et al.). Migrant Pintails showed up 3/10 at Dunkirk (Parker) and 3/12 at Oak Orchard (Mitchell). Ditto for Baldpate, with an additional record on 3/3 at Celeron (Elderkin). A single Ring-necked Duck was seen off Grand Island on 1/22 (Beardslee) and 2/25 (Schaffner, Brownsteins). The largest number of Canvasbacks ever counted on the Niagara River (15,196) was a highlight of our Federation census. Five thousand Old Squaws were in the lower river on that occasion, filling the air with their "ah, ah-de-le" calls. Ruddy Ducks were noted as late as 1/28 (three at outlet of L. Chautauqua, Parker), and Robinson reported one there 3/18. The usual wintering Hooded Mergansers were absent, the year's first record being a prompt 3/17 (Celeron, Elderkin).

HAWKS — OWLS: The first Turkey Vulture was reported from Chestnut Ridge Park 3/13 (Coggeshall); the species was not seen at Oak Orchard until 3/27. Bald Eagles were reported every month, mostly from the Grand Island area. Elderkin found a Duck Hawk at Frewsburg 3/13. Coots were seen all winter at Niagara Gorge, Grand Island, L. Chautauqua, and Dunkirk. One had returned to Oak Orchard 3/18 (Brockner). Our first Killdeer record was of two at Alden on 3/3 (Wolfling). Glaucous and Iceland Gulls were reported throughout the period (mostly single individuals). One Kumlien's Gull was seen 12/8 at the Falls (Coggeshall) and one on the lower river 3/18 (North). Wintering Little Gulls (very unusual) were reported on the Niagara during December and as late as 1/8 (2 at Lewiston, Schaffner et al.). A Kittiwake was observed in the Niagara Gorge 12/24 (Kemnitzner) and 12/25 (Axtells). A few Bonaparte's Gulls were seen through January and February and as late as 3/11 (12 on lower river, Beardslee). An early Common Tern was observed by Mitchell off Grand Island 3/31. Snowy Owl records were very few. Long-eared and Short-eared Owls were frequently seen on Grand Island throughout the period, and from one to three Saw-whets could almost always be found in the Lewiston cemetery.

SWIFTS — SHRIKES: The only winter record of a Kingfisher was of one which appeared out of nowhere 1/29 at Forest Lawn Cemetery (Brockner) and returned to the same place. A few wintering Flickers were reported. A Red-bellied Woodpecker was seen at the Bakers' feeder at Belmont from 1/1 to 1/12 (fide McMurtry). Several Red-headed Woodpeckers (max. 8) wintered just east of Youngstown. The Heilborns' Austrian pines attracted a Sapsucker from 12/1 to 12/26 (most unusual). Probably the first migrant Prairie Horned Larks were those reported 1/22 from Grand Island (Rew, Rathbun, Verrill) and from Cambria (Nathan et al.). Our only Northern Horned Lark record comes from Mrs. McMurtry who found one at Wellsville 2/24. Carolina Wrens were seen at Jamestown (Parker), Hamburg (Avery), and Olean (Eaton) during the period. Mockingbirds visited the Koch feeder at Dunkirk and the Kuhn feeder at New Leon throughout February. A Hermit Thrush was seen at Dunkirk 1/7 and 2/1 to 2/5 (Meierhofer, rep. Stanley). The first Bluebird was noted at Oak Orchard on 3/4 (Brockner). Gray Shrikes were repeatedly seen throughout the area during all four months. The first Loggerhead Shrike was found near Wolcottsville 3/23 (Mitchell).

VIREOS — WARBLERS: A Myrtle Warbler was seen in the Youngstown Cemetery by many observers from 12/11 to 2/19.

BLACKBIRDS — SPARROWS: Mrs. McMurtry reported 75 Red-wings at Belmont on 2/27. A Rusty Blackbird was seen at Oak Orchard on 3/14 (Creighton

et al.). Grackles were first reported by Wolfling from Alden (6 on 3/3), and Cowbirds by Mitchell from Oak Orchard (10 on 3/12). Evening Grosbeaks were present in many localities and in large numbers (100 Frewsburg, 80 Hamburg, 100 East Aurora, 150 Wellsville). Mrs. McMurtry had Purple Finches at Wellsville all winter; few were reported elsewhere. Siskins were much more numerous than usual; most of the flocks were rather small, but many observers reported finding them, and Eaton writes of "large flocks" wintering. Common Redpolls were well represented, most being recorded in February. Both species of crossbills were reported rather frequently, they being most numerous in, but by no means confined to, Cattaraugus County. A Towhee may have wintered at Chestnut Ridge Park; it was seen there 3/5 (Creighton et al.). From 1/7 to 3/31 a female Oregon Junco was seen daily at the Klabunde feeding station at Lewiston, where scores of birders were privileged to study it. A White-throated Sparrow spent the entire winter at the Avery feeder at Hamburg. I thought Tree Sparrows were especially common this winter. A single Fox Sparrow visited the Avery feeder in Hamburg from 3/11 to 3/15. Our first Swamp Sparrow record is supplied by Mrs. McMurtry, who observed one at Wellsville 3/5. Longspur records were few, but many Snow Buntings were seen, some in tremendous flocks, the largest being one of 3000 (2/28 and 2/29, Armor, by Bason et al.).

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REGION 2 — GENESEE

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The winter of 1955-56 was marked by a total snowfall of 119.6 inches up to April 10, the largest amount in recent years. Continued cold from November to the very end of March kept the bird population at a comparatively low level and held back early migrants. The Christmas Census gave only 64 species compared to high counts of 77 in 1953 and 1954.

LOONS — DUCKS: The Red-throated Loon was last seen on Dec. 4 and did not appear again until March 11; the Common Loon showed up on March 25 after an absence of 5 months.

A Great Blue Heron survived until mid-January at the Clover St. Locks of the Barge Canal (Dakins), and a Bittern was seen near open water in the Braddocks Bay marsh by Listman on Feb. 14.

Four Whistling Swans appeared at Braddocks Bay on Mar. 24. Among the Geese, only the Canada had been seen by the end of March. These first appeared at Durand Eastman on Mar. 4 (N. Moon) and built up to a flock of about 1000 at bays westward along the lake, principally at Shore Acres.

Normal duck population was maintained through the winter months, but the migrants normally appearing in March were retarded. Pintail was reported once in January and once in February, but definite migration did not start until about March 11. Unusual duck records for the winter were 1 Wood Duck by Klonick at the southern Tip of Irondequoit Bay on Dec. 26, and 3 American Scoters by Taylor, Conway and Mahoney in Lake Ontario at Rigney's Bluff on Jan. 2.

HAWKS — OWLS: Red-tailed and Sparrow Hawks, our most abundant hawks during winter, were reported regularly. The Cooper's and Sharp-shinned were present in much smaller numbers. The Rough-legged was unusually scarce. After May 1955, this bird was not seen until Jan. 15, 1956 (McKinney), and then not until March 25 (Corcoran). The Marsh Hawk was seen sparingly, but in every month throughout the winter (Dec. 26, by Corcoran; Jan. 29, by Dobson; Feb. 14, by Listman and March 24, by O'Hara).

First Coot on Lake Ontario near Rochester were seen by L. Moon on Feb. 13. Possibly these birds had migrated from Canandaigua Lake where a flock of about 100 were reported in Jan. (Whites and Dakins).

Black-backed Gulls were down somewhat from the numbers of recent winters. Many check lists reported 3 to 5 birds. Iceland and Glaucous gulls were well distributed along the lakeshore throughout the winter, but usually only single birds were reported. A Kumlein's Gull was seen on the Christmas Census (Dec. 26) at the mouth of the Genesee River. It was first spotted by A. Kemnitz, but was