

THE JANUARY WATERFOWL COUNT: II

GERALD R. RISING

The second annual New York State waterfowl census has been recorded (see Tables I and II) and the results are gratifying. A comparison of the 1956 results with those of 1955 forms the basis for this satisfaction: 222,408 birds counted to 189,324; 39 species to 36; 268 observers to 231; and 655 party hours in the field to 550. Although the results of the years are certainly not enough to establish a basis for making sweeping conclusions about waterfowl populations, the 1955 and 1956 results certainly provide some interesting information which may give an indication of both the usefulness of the count and its shortcomings. (For the 1955 summaries and an outline of count procedure see Rising, 1955, *Kingbird* 5 (2): 34-36.)

At the outset it is important to establish that the count is already mature. Estimates of regional coverage by the regional chairmen and the pattern of close comparison in totals with the conservation department aerial census indicate that the results are valid, the information comparable. A personal estimate of our present coverage is over 90%; that is, we could have counted less than 10% more birds. Future years will probably show a 5% improvement with the count steadying at that level. Although the effect of this factor should be considered, its influence appears to be minor.

On the other hand the difference in totals from 1955 to 1956 points out the fact that weather exerts an all-important influence on the count. Neglect of this single factor would make the statistics meaningless. On the 1956 count it may very well be more striking than on any other for some time. For the first time in at least a decade birders were faced with extensive areas of Lake Ontario frozen. Calm weather just before the census period of January 14-22, left still water, and ice formed from a quarter to three-quarters of a mile off-shore. By the second weekend fortunately some of this ice was broken by wave action and observation was more satisfactory. At the same time the Adirondack-Champlain region suffered through a 28 day period preceding the count during which the average temperature was -2° F. This cold, making its effect felt statewide, forced many dabblers farther south, but brought from the north over 40,000 more divers than in 1955.

Whereas the increase in diving ducks should be welcomed, the decrease in dabblers and specifically the 30% decrease in Black Duck numbers should not. There is some evidence to indicate that the Black Duck population has suffered and that the smaller numbers are not entirely due to a further retreat from the inordinate cold. At the same time these heavily hunted ducks showed this decline, other dabblers as well as geese and swans held their own. Conservationists may wish to keep this difference in mind in the future. There is already some feeling that care is no longer being exercised in controlling the seasons despite such reductions in numbers of some species (see Bellrose and Scott, 1955, *Wilson Bulletin* 67 (4): 310-312.) It has already been decided to retain the lengthened waterfowl season for 1956.

Five species were observed on the 1956 count which were not tabulated in 1955: Snow Goose, Blue-winged Teal, Tufted Duck, Barrow's Golden-eye, and Common Eider. Harlequin Duck and King Eider, reported in 1955, did not occur in 1956. The Tufted Duck, a close relative of our Scaup indigen-

TABLE I — SPECIES TOTALS BY REGION

REGION	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	Totals
Common Loon			4		1		18			75	98
Red-throated Loon										34	34
Red-necked Grebe					1					2	3
Horned Grebe			169		91	3	43		2	1384	1692
Pied-billed Grebe	2		26	1	1	1			4	67	102
Mute Swan					2					408	410
Whistling Swan										1	1
Canada Goose			16							1578	1594
Brant										4233	4233
Snow Goose										1	1
Mallard	733	23	136	515	93	4		103	124	3393	5124
Black Duck	1808	247	307	169	300	59	67	778	594	15882	20211
Gadwall	1									139	140
Pintail	25									126	151
Green-winged Teal								1		70	71
Blue-winged Teal										1	1
European Widgeon										2	2
Baldpate										1492	1492
Shoveller										39	39
Wood Duck					2					1	3
Redhead	272	11	2149		9	378		1	1	111	2932
Ring-necked Duck	1				6		1		175	264	447
Canvasback	15196	9	1123		907	21			99	4347	21702
Greater Scaup Duck*	4379	1062	9402		1994	6123	12	2	3	83341	106318
Lesser Scaup Duck*			38		10					226	274
Tufted Duck										1	1
American Golden-eye	4938	1377	213	5	983	3518	400	161	77	4683	16355
Barrow's Golden-eye								1			1
Bufflehead	336	7	15		16	63	13			928	1378
Oldsquaw	5017	131	21		55	61				2224	7509
Common Eider										3	3
White-winged Scoter	14	38				5		2		8865	8924
Surf Scoter										1126	1126
American Scoter										322	322
Ruddy Duck	2		4				1		2	164	173
Hooded Merganser	8	1	2	3	3			1	15	198	231
American Merganser	2810	333	673	376	3161	190	200	170	810	648	9371
Red-br. Merganser	74	145	1		106	3		40		2530	2899
Coot	3		294		1					519	817
Unidentified	439	39	2039	1	192	1035	1		53	2424**	6223**
TOTALS	36058	3423	16632	1070	7934	11464	756	1260	1959	141852	222408

*Unspecified scaup ducks are included in the Greater Scaup totals.

**Region 10 unidentified includes 2300 scoters, 1 eider.

TABLE II — TOTAL COMPARISONS**

REGION	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	Totals
Loons and Grebes	2	*	199	1	94	4	61	*	6	1562	1929
	*	7	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	4		766	2	6	1	*		17	1196	1999
Swans and Geese			16		2					6221	6239
			162	*						27415	27577
	1		13				*		2	4575	4591
Dabblers	2567	270	443	784	395	63	67	882	718	21145	27234
	2320	11	3210	*	100	700	79	1802	573	35962	44757
	664	172	2480	344	795	47	*	2020	1484	27515	35521
Divers (exc. those listed below)	30139	2597	12961	5	3980	10164	426	165	355	96125	156911
	20775	1932	28099	*	1242	14480	1205	10	6	83031	150780
	17738	2808	10499		3516	1902	*	54	1005	75193	112715
Eider, Scoters and Ruddy Ducks	16	38	4			5	1	2	2	12781	12849
	54	15	31	*	12					7713	7825
	189	9			1		*		5	14742	14946
Mergansers	2892	479	676	379	3270	193	200	211	825	3376	12501
	3350	380	418	*	445	2093	182	192	150	2254	9464
	5027	954	311	194	3027	11	*	217	692	3865	14298
Coot	3		294		1					519	817
	5	30	1081	*	4		*		58	200	200
										637	1815
TOTALS	36058	3423	16632	1070	7934	11464	756	1260	1959	141852	222408
	26499	2338	31920	*	1799	17273	1466	2004	729	147390	230418
	23964	4009	15480	540	7377	2174	*	2291	3306	130183	189324

**Read groups as follows: top line: 1956 Federation total
middle line: 1956 aerial total
bottom line: 1955 Federation total

*Region VII was not censused in 1955; the aerial count does not include loons and grebes; and does not cover Region IV

ous to Europe, is a new North American visitant. Although it may be that the bird is a game farm or zoo escape, the fact that the same species was reported earlier in the winter from Ontario, Canada lends credence to the possibility that the bird is a true straggler. The Barrow's Golden-eye, while not quite the celebrity, was the first species reported upstate in two years which was not also reported on Long Island. It was seen in the Albany area. Other interesting records include two Wood Ducks and two Mute Swans in the Syracuse area, a continuing increase of Canvasbacks in the Niagara River.

Again with the cooperation of Dirck Benson of the New York State Conservation Department, we were given the data from the aerial duck count. Regional chairmen examined the results of the aerial census and compared these results with their own in many specific areas. One obvious reason for differences is the fact that the counts were not taken at the same time. The date span for the aerial count is wider, and even in cases where the counts were close the aerial count is taken during the week, the Federation count usually on a weekend. The 4% overall difference is again a credit to both counts, much of this difference due to inadequate Federation coverage in the Finger Lakes Region. On the other hand some regional editors were quite skeptical of the aerial totals in areas closely checked from the ground.

Credit for the success of this census must be even more widely distributed this year. To each field worker must go a share of this credit, but even more than they the regional chairmen deserve special note for their untiring efforts.

72 Allen's Creek Road, Rochester 18.

EXCERPTS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE FEDERATION COUNCIL MEETING

Pleasantville, New York, May 11, 1956

Dr. Dernel Every of the Saw Mill River Audubon Society welcomed the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs to Pleasantville. The ninth annual council meeting was then called to order, president Peter Paul Kellogg presiding, 22 delegates representing 16 clubs present.

Committees

Bibliography Committee: All serial publications containing references to New York State birds have been listed and cross referencing will begin soon. All clubs have been requested to send in a bibliography of publications of their group, and individuals are invited to call attention to articles which they feel the committee has missed.

Conservation Committee: A study is to be initiated into the subject of protection of the Kingfisher. The council went on record supporting the Erie County Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs in their efforts to enact a law protecting all hawks and owls. The law was originally sponsored by the Buffalo Audubon Society. The council also recorded opposition to legislature permitting sale of detached parcels of forest preserve land in the bills' present form.