

1956-1957 INVASION OF ARCTIC WOODPECKERS

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The past winter has been noteworthy for the most remarkable invasion of Arctic Woodpeckers, *Picoides arcticus*, ever recorded in the ornithological history in our state of New York. It may be well, therefore, to compare the results with former recorded invasions of this species, and to cover some of the previous knowledge of its range and of its wanderings and feeding habits in this and nearby areas.

Eaton (1) states, "Confined to spruce and balsam belt of Canadian Zone during breeding season and permanent resident, but in late fall and winter wanders some distance from its normal habitat. Recorded from Tully, Syracuse, Chautauqua Co., Sag Harbor, Ithaca, Sennett, Cattaraugus Co., Orleans Co., Saratoga, Bridgehampton and Poestenkill, dates October 6-February 22. Commonest in November and December."

The only actual breeding specimens are from the Adirondack wilderness but also reported as breeding in Tioga County near Smithborough and in the higher portions of the Catskills. Next to Sapsucker and Hairy Woodpecker in abundance in spruce and balsam belt and much more common than American Three-toed and Downy Woodpeckers. Feeds on boring and bark beetles.

Forbush (2) gives dates for Massachusetts, September 28 - May 23 (June 12, summer). He mentions that invasions of this species may follow summers when its food has been unusually abundant, with consequent increase in numbers of young birds raised to maturity.

Van Tyne (3) reports on a heavy flight in 1923 and offers a similar explanation. He also says that in 1909 and 1914 there was an irruption of the spruce budworm in Eastern Canada and Maine causing the death of many trees and increase of bark beetles and borers, followed by an increase in numbers of Arctic Woodpeckers.

Forbush (2) also mentions a great irruption in the autumn of 1860, when six or eight birds were seen at one time on a piece of fire-killed pine trunk in Lynn (Brewster, 4). A lesser movement occurred in the autumn of 1925 and another in 1926.

In *Audubon Field Notes* for the fall migration in the New England area, it is stated that the invasion of the Arctic Woodpecker constitutes the third such invasion in Massachusetts ornithological history and shows promise of being the greatest ever recorded. Their records started September 29, 1956, with two records, followed by a flood of October and November records from Massachusetts, but none reach Rhode Island. However, one was recorded in Nantucket October 21.

In the New England notes it was also stated that the last big flight was in 1923 and that some birds from that flight apparently lingered until 1926. We should be on the watch for stragglers next winter. Since 1926 there have been only three Massachusetts reports. In the fall of 1956 reports had already been received from 16 localities.

Audubon Field Notes for the Ontario-Western New York region note first records of the 1956 invasion September 25 at Barrie, Ontario, followed by reports in October from London and Pt. Pelee, Ontario, and in New York

at Wilson, October 20, by the Axtells, and from one to two individuals at the same place by many observers soon afterward. The birds were stripping the bark from hemlocks, felled by a bulldozer, to get at the bark beetles and borers. Later many were noted stripping the bark from dead elms, to get at the bark beetles. This was particularly noticeable in the cities of Rochester and Buffalo, where these events were noted in the press. Motion pictures taken by Fred Hall illustrate how the Arctic Woodpeckers carry out their characteristic procedure in debarking trees to get at the bark beetles. While Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers have been noted on the trees so debarked, I believe they were merely gleaning the remaining insects left by the Arctic Woodpeckers which instituted the work.

Regarding the Arctic Woodpeckers' fall migration, William Gunn (5) states, "There is some indication that they may have come from Central Quebec rather than from Northern Ontario, where they were conspicuous by their absence last summer."

Among the early 1956 fall records were: October 14, two male birds in Chenango Valley State Park by Robert Saunders, Elinor Whitson and Tony Wiegiers (rep. by Leslie E. Bemont) and one bird on October 20 at Mianus Gorge, Bedford Village where it was studied closely by Douglas Orbison, Mabel Little and Gerald Wood (rep. by Fred N. Hough).

A female was seen in Letchworth Park near the Lower Falls by Clayton Knox on October 28, 1956, and a male was seen at Wolf Run in the same park on November 4 by Mr. and Mrs. Edward Ulrich and party. One bird was seen as far south as Culvers Gap, Sussex County, New Jersey on October 22, 1956.

The Genesee Region furnished more reports than any other of our New York State regions, although the first record was not until November 18, near 1105 Monroe Avenue, Rochester. In this locale many observers saw several birds, believed to be seven in all, three males and four females, as late as April, 1957. A female at Scottsville November 23, 1956, and another at Long Pond Woods near Lake Ontario on April 27, 1957, were seen by O'Hara and Miller. A male and a female were seen between January 2 and 10 at Morville Drive, Rochester, by Leo Tanghe, and a female near the lake at Summerville Boulevard on December 30 by the Whites. Several other reports by non-birders, but not confirmed, are not included above.

An American Three-toed Woodpecker female was seen on several occasions at Genesee Valley Park between December 27, 1956 and March 1, by Muchmore and others, and a female (possibly the same bird) was seen about two miles away at Winslow Road by Starling and Brumer on May 11, 1957.

The only report from the Finger Lakes area was of one seen in mid-January, 1957, by David Allen in the flooded trees on the west side of Sapsucker Woods Pond.

Frank Clinch reports that a bird was seen several times from December on by Belknap, who once saw two birds, and another was seen by Arthur W. Allen on March 10, 1957 between Clayton and St. Vincent. A specimen was brought to Thomas Lesperance on December 8, but this is in the bird's normal habitat, in all probability. Walter Spofford listed one from Fayetteville on the Syracuse Christmas Count on December 30. Other Syracuse

area records submitted by Fritz Scheider include a male near Ava, Oneida County on December 1, 1956, by A. Jones of Oneida; a female in the third week of January, 1957 near Manlius (fide Mrs. R. Gould, Manlius, N. Y.). A series of records from the Three Rivers Game Management area two miles NE of Baldwinsville, Onondaga County, as follows:

In flooded Elm Swamp, Scheider and Maurice Wrangell saw a female Arctic Woodpecker on February 17; a male and two females were seen on February 24 in the same area by Mr. and Mrs. J. Smith and Mr. and Mrs. Al Fudge of Elmira; a female seen March 3 in the same place by Scheider; a female seen March 10 in the same place by Evans and Scheider. Evidence of work of the Arctic Woodpecker also found at Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse and at Camillus. In all but one case, the birds were noted "debarking" dead or dying elms. The one exception was evidence of fresh work on dead cedars adjacent to an elm swamp.

James Merritt reports a female first seen December 22 at Watervliet Reservoir in their Christmas Count, and it was still nearby on January 20 (Esly Hallenbeck and Jim Merritt). A male was seen by George Gorman at New Rochelle, April 28, 1957 (fide Watson Hastings.)

John Elliott reports a male seen by members of the Lyman Langdon Audubon Society at Mill Neck, Long Island in mid-February for over a week. It fed voraciously on the trunks of dead Red or Scotch Pines. John later visited the area and was surprised at the large sections of bark, some over a square foot in area, which had been ripped off. Bark was lying in patches around the foot of each dead tree. "One particular tree, a Japanese Black Pine, of an estimated 25-30 feet with around a ten-inch base was practically denuded clear to its top, its yellow undercoat ragged and gouged from the powerful beak of the feeding bird as it bored into the decaying and sound interior." John reports that the Queens County Bird Club had an Arctic Woodpecker on one of the field trips early this year (no details available).

In Western New York a bird was seen by Charles Simmons while hunting near Little Genesee, east of Olean, on November 24.

A male Arctic Woodpecker appeared on a dead elm at the corner of Parkridge and Minnesota Avenues, Buffalo on December 9 and was reported to Gertrude Webster, his teacher, by a schoolboy, Tony Ucci. One bird, possibly the same one, was reported at 196 Shirley Ave., Buffalo, by another of her students. At least one remained in the neighborhood until December 25. I have motion pictures of a bird feeding in this area, taken by Fred Hall of the Buffalo Museum of Science.

Mrs. Milligan of 5189 Abbott Road, near Armor, south of Buffalo, had been seeing an Arctic Woodpecker working on a decaying apple tree in her yard, without being sure of its identity. She finally called in Mrs. John Bacon of Hamburg who fortunately saw the bird on the last day it was seen, April 10, and could verify the identification.

I now know of at least 36 birds seen in New York State out of their normal range during the 1956-57 winter, as compared with about 43 Massachusetts records from reports at hand as I write this paper. I think that it is quite possible, as James Merritt suggests, that our territorial coverage leaves much to be desired. I doubt if Massachusetts had more Arctic Wood-

peckers present than New York State had during this invasion, but I feel sure that Massachusetts has more trained observers per square mile than we have.

On the other hand, the Christmas Count shows only one Massachusetts bird, whereas New York State had a total of eight, five from Rochester, and one each from Buffalo, Schenectady and Syracuse. Also one American Three-toed Woodpecker was reported from Rochester, so it looks as if we held up our end there.

My thanks are extended to the many regional editors who supplied me with the interesting data without which this article could not have been written and especially to Fred Hall for the loan of his excellent film showing closeups of the Arctic Woodpecker.

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- (1) Eaton, E. H., *Birds of New York*, Vol. II, p. 145.
 - (2) Forbush, E. H., *Birds of Massachusetts and Other New England States*, Vol. II, p. 271-273.
 - (3) Van Tyne, Josselyn, *Auk* 1926, p. 469-474.
 - (4) Brewster, William, *Bull. Nuttall Ornithological Club*, 1883, p. 122.
 - (5) Gunn, William, *Audubon Field Notes*, Vol. II, No. 1 (Feb. 1957), p. 24.
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BREEDING HAWKS ON EASTERN LONG ISLAND

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This paper incorporates notes on seven species of breeding hawks on eastern Long Island, New York, as recorded by the writer.

Sharp-shinned Hawk: There are five local nesting records in over 50 years for this abundant transient and frequent winter visitant. Nesting localities are Montauk, North Haven, Riverhead, Southold and Orient. All five nesting sites have been in dissimilar habitats. At Montauk they nested in the center of a large dry woods, the nest 30 feet up in the main crotch of an oak. At North Haven they built in a dry pasture with scattered cedars, the nest 12 feet up in the main crotch of a red cedar. At Riverhead the habitat was in a dark white cedar swamp: the nest was 20 feet up in the center crotch of a white cedar. This was a very dark site, the sun being shut out at all times. At Southold they selected the border of a sand-dune facing Long Island Sound. The nest was 15 feet up in the main crotch of a pitch pine. At Orient the nest was built 25 feet up in the main crotch of a tall cedar at the edge of a salt marsh. In the localities quoted, only the one in the cedar swamp at Riverhead had been occupied before, where an old nest of the previous year was found in an adjoining tree. All of the others were the first nesting records for those stations.

Cooper's Hawk: This is a more general breeding hawk on eastern Long Island than the sharp-shin, although it is restricted to single breeding pairs in any location. It is partial to tracts of dry woods, but also nests in swamps. The nest is usually in a center crotch, normally 15 to 20 feet up, and has been recorded up to 60 feet high. Most of the nests the writer has examined have been in old Crow's nests, which have been enlarged by twigs and trash