

THE JANUARY WATERFOWL COUNTS: IV AND V

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This year's report represents a belated effort to bring these waterfowl counts up to date with the inclusion of the 1958 data. Counts for previous years are given in the Kingbird: Volume 5, pages 34-6 (1955); Volume 6, pages 40-2 (1956) and Volume 7, pages 6-7 (1957). The value of these counts increases as the data accumulate.

After five years it is natural to examine these data for trends, especially with respect to the question "Is the total number of wintering waterfowl increasing or decreasing?" Following are the grand totals of wintering waterfowl of New York State for the past five years:

	Ground Count	Aerial Count
1955 -----	189,234	197,015*
1956 -----	222,408	238,768*
1957 -----	204,509	214,154
1958 -----	169,819	315,300
1959 -----	183,972	208,930

*Revised slightly from the numbers given in the Kingbird

The ground counts were made by the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, and the aerial counts by the New York State Conservation Department. 1958 gave the lowest, and 1959 the second lowest ground counts for the five year period. However, the aerial count for 1958 was the highest for the five year period, due mainly to an additional 100,000 Scaup Ducks in Long Island waters. No trend is discernible from these data.

Neither is any definite long term trend yet discernible for any individual species. To be sure, there are many instances where the count of a given species is greatly different, say more than double or less than half the count of the previous year. Such an instance is the Mute Swan, whose population on Long Island in 1959 is about double that of previous years. All such instances should be examined carefully in search for a plausible reason, such as weather and food supply in the wintering and breeding areas, hunting pressure, etc. Data covering at least ten years will probably be necessary to reveal any long term trends.

Except for 1958 there was surprisingly good agreement between the totals for the ground and aerial counts. However, when the totals were in reasonable agreement, there were usually discrepancies in the counts of certain species. The following interesting examples may be cited from a comparison of the 1959 ground and aerial counts. Details of the aerial counts were kindly supplied by Mr. Dirck Benson, Game Research Investigator for the Conservation Department of the State of New York.

The aerial count for Black Ducks on Long Island was about 10,000 higher than the ground count. Both counts showed Black Ducks around the entire periphery of the island, with biggest concentration in Jamaica Bay.

The aerial count for Mallards was about 2500 less than the ground count. In this case the Long Island aerial count was lower than, but in reasonable agreement with the ground count. The aerial count did not cover the Susquehanna and its tributaries, but a flock of 350 Mallards was seen by ground observers on the Chemango River near Oxford, N. Y. The aerial count

did include the Niagara River but did not report any Mallards. Buffalo ground observers reported 740 Mallards, about two thirds of which were on the Niagara River above the Falls.

The ground count of Redheads in the Finger Lake Region was 11,630, about twice the aerial count for that area, and about four times the average Redhead count for 1955 to 1958. Mrs. J. Southgate Y. Hoyt forwarded me the records from this area. Local observers reported 6360 Redheads on Jan 18, 1959, the major counts being 1500 on the East Shore of Cayuga Lake, north to Union Springs, 740 on the West Shore of Cayuga Lake, north to Canoga, 3300 on Seneca Lake, and smaller numbers on Keuka and Canandaigua Lakes. On Jan 17, Mr. Fritz Scheider of Syracuse reported 5270 Redheads from the north end of Cayuga Lake, from Canoga on the West Shore to East Varick on the East Shore. Mrs. Hoyt, commenting on the possibility of duplicate counts on the same birds, wrote as follows:

"Most of our groups were out on the 18th, but on the 17th Fritz Scheider worked around on the north end of Cayuga Lake, concentrating on the Canoga marshes on the west side, going in at six different places, on foot. I feel that the five or six thousand ducks he got there were different ducks from any of the others counted the next day, and that this is not duplication. However, since the ice-line changes from day to day in that area, and since the waterfowl do move around somewhat, I thought I should at least show his count separately, as a matter of interest. But you might as well use the totals, as I doubt if duplication would be more than 1000."

The aerial count for the Finger Lakes Region on Jan 23, 1959 showed 1050 Redheads on Canandaigua, 665 on Keuka, 2125 on Seneca, 845 on Cayuga north of Sheldrake, 400 on Cayuga south of Sheldrake, and 200 on Skaneateles Lake, for a total of 5285.

The aerial count on Oldsquaw was about 4000 less than the ground count. Mr. Bernard Nathan of Buffalo reported 2800 on the Niagara River below the Falls, but the birds escaped detection on the aerial survey.

The aerial count of Scoters was only 1367, whereas the ground count was over 13,000, mostly from Long Island.

In the above instances the ground counts were greater than the aerial counts. This situation was drastically reversed for the Brant where the ground count was only 2962 and the aerial count was 34,300. These were in large off-shore flocks along Long Island from South Oyster Bay to Jamaica Bay.

The reasons for some of the discrepancies are obvious; others may never be resolved. These instances have been presented to alert both ground and air observers in the future.

The instances of excellent agreement between ground and aerial counts are far more numerous than the occasional discrepancies.

Mr. Thomas Lesperance, reporting for Region 7, could find no waterfowl or open water in the Adirondack area. He pleaded for a later date for the count so that this magnificent area of our state would be represented in the Waterfowl Count. However, a later date would defeat the purpose of the count, which is to record wintering waterfowl.

In conclusion, may I extend by thanks to all observers who braved the winter elements to make this count possible.

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1958 New York State

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VIII	IX	X-a	X-b	Totals
Common Loon								1	19	165	185
Red-throated Loon									20	38	58
Red-necked Grebe					5				1	20	26
Horned Grebe			119		11	7			763	804	1704
Pied-billed Grebe			5		2			3	1	84	95
Mute Swan									1	311	312
Whistling Swan										3	3
Canada Goose			26		20				35	1917	1998
Brant									460	1963	2423
Snow Goose											
Mallard	153	12	375	364	481	47	13	1	169	2274	4126
Black Duck	1071	249	465	196	980	765	450	238	709	11160	16984
Gadwall								939	1	90	91
Pintail					10					73	83
Green-winged Teal									58	65	123
European Widgeon			29							2	2
American Widgeon										4792	4821
Shoveler					1					19	20
Wood Duck					3					2	8
Redhead	61	133	2415		621	14		1	3	129	3377
Ring-necked Duck	1		8					82		19	110
Canvasback	15372	150	1311		321	43		183	203	2767	20351
Greater Scaup	4712	1985	856	1	6443	316		7	18419	31970	64708
Lesser Scaup			2		93				236	57	388
Common Goldeneye	2550	1755	317	4	909	1574	8	40	210	2213	9580
Bufflehead	60	8	17		129				195	552	961
Oldsquaw	5428	256	2		171	82			57	1130	7126
Common Eider										7	7
King Eider										18	18
White-winged Scoter	3	24			19				216	11504	11766
Surf Scoter					7				4	2452	2463
Common Scoter									56	1108	1164
Ruddy Duck					1				166	356	523
Hooded Merganser			2		2			81		77	162
Common Merganser	466	239	8	218	6470	334	30	318	8	242	8333
Red-breasted Merganser	299	20	10		183	3			307	1882	2704
Coot	6		243		3			11		765	1028
Unidentified	646	200	4		377	303			155	302	1987
Totals	30828	5031	6214	783	17262	3488	501	1905	22475	81332	169819

1959 New York State

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VIII	IX	X-a	X-b	Totals
Common Loon	1								1	52	54
Red-throated Loon										9	9
Red-necked Grebe					1						1
Horned Grebe			228		31				85	501	845
Pied-billed Grebe			1		2				1	33	37
Mute Swan									5	566	571
Canada Goose			13		72			16	96	1270	1467
Brant										2962	2962
Snow Goose										2	2
Mallard	740	190	212	379	536		200	106	59	2950	5372
Black Duck	904	207	954	154	2862	35	800	492	808	12359	19575
Gadwall										117	117
Pintail	3				14					145	162
Green-winged Teal				1						83	86
American Widgeon	2		2		2				24	3558	3586
Shoveler					1					65	66
Wood Duck		1	2	1	5					3	12
Redhead	5	50	11630	3	235					31	11954
Ring-necked Duck			16							100	182
Canvasback	1275	65	5889		592			66			
Greater Scaup	6168	795	3073		7027	1500	1	35	1798	3148	12602
Lesser Scaup	3				161				17451	36757	72772
Common Goldeneye	3332	3253	685	57	1611	6507	80	229	368	3385	19507
Barrows' Goldeneye							1				1
Bufflehead	178	26	48		69			13	215	1914	2463
Oldsquaw	2824	272	8		153				5	2736	5998
Common Eider										1	1
King Eider		8								7	7
White-winged Scoter					2				21	12719	12750
Surf Scoter										528	528
Common Scoter			7							282	289
Ruddy Duck		1			1				1	66	69
Hooded Merganser	4		3							109	135
Common Merganser	1044	117	82	149	2551	50	12	763	1	189	4958
Red-breasted Merganser	81	36	7		188				80	1515	1907
Coot			221	15	2					385	623
Unidentified	500	300	180		108				450	600	2138
Totals	17064	5321	23061	759	16227	8092	1094	1738	21469	89147	183972