

REGION 3 — FINGER LAKES

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This winter offered strange and interesting contrasts with last winter. We shuddered, as December wore on, wondering if it was a promise of a year worse than last. Heavy snows and record-breaking low temperatures for the month covered natural food early and drove waterfowl from small lakes and ponds onto large ones farther south. Horned Grebes were caught by the early freeze-up. The first part of January was similar — then came a thaw, with floods on Jan 22, removing almost entirely the snow cover. February and March had below normal temperatures, but almost no snow. Consequently the birds were able to find plenty of food to provide the needed heat and energy, and probably made out better than in 1958. Frost penetrated deep into the ground, and it remains to be seen if there will be much plant damage from winter "burn" and drying conditions.

Among winter visitors, there were few Snowy Owls, Northern Shrikes and Rough-legged Hawks. Purple Finches, Pine Siskins and Evening Grosbeaks were our winter finches this year, but not in record-breaking numbers by any means.

Loons — Ducks: Again there have been very few reports of Loons. Four Red-necked Grebes were seen on Cayuga on Mar 31 (D. McIlroy). Many Horned Grebes were trapped by early freezes, and, weakened by lack of food, "crash-landed" in odd places. At least four were brought to the Laboratory of Ornithology in December and January. A Pied-billed Grebe was found on the street in Waterloo on Mar 17 and was banded and released by Jayson Walker. A Great Blue Heron was seen at Montezuma on Jan 31, and from then on an occasional one was seen until this species became common in late March. Of interest is the appearance of Whistling Swans in the region this spring. On Mar 9 five were reported flying over the Refuge Main Pool at Montezuma, and others were seen from that date until the end of March, the largest number being 16 on Mar 26. Other small groups were seen on Cayuga Lake, one remained near Penn Yan on Keuka in March and early April (Lerch), and four stopped off at the south end of Seneca the last week in March.

Due to the early severe winter conditions, all geese, except for two Canadas that joined the captive flock, left Montezuma during the first week of December (quite in contrast to last year). Six Canadas arrived Feb 27. The numbers built up slowly, until by Apr 1, 2500 geese were roosting nightly on the ice of the Main Pool. Old-timers said they had never seen as many Canada Geese on Cayuga Lake. Spofford estimated 20,000 on Mar 28, in the Farleys Point - Union Springs area, but this may not represent the peak count. Seven Snow Geese and one Blue were seen with the Canadas on Mar 31 (D. McIlroy) and there were other reports of one and two at a time for several weeks.

Three Black Ducks were recorded on the Big Spring at Montezuma on Jan 1 and may have wintered there. Blacks came with Mallards in a mixed flock of up to 200, to feed daily at the Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary during the winter. Ward reported Blacks in good numbers on Seneca on Dec 28. There were four Blacks on the Conhocton River at Avoca on Mar 22 (Carter). A female American Widgeon appeared some days at Sapsucker Woods in the early part of the winter, and three males were seen on Mar 12; four were at Union Springs on Mar 14 (Spofford) and 21 at Watkins Glen on Mar 17-27 (Bardeen). The first Pintail was recorded at Montezuma on Feb 27, but one had been seen at the south end of Cayuga on Jan 12. An early Green-winged Teal showed up at Sapsucker Woods on Mar 9. A pair of Wood Ducks flew back and forth daily from the Stewart Park duck pond to Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary.

The cold early winter brought diving ducks in early and in good numbers on Cayuga, especially at the north end. For example, Scheider counted over 5,000 Red heads, mostly near Canoga, and 1300 Canvasbacks on the census on Jan 17. The total Region 3 count of these divers on the waterfowl census was 11,630 Redheads,

5,689 Canvasbacks and over 3,000 Scaup, the highest for these three species in some years. Canvasbacks and Redheads were not so common on Seneca at the first of the year (Ward), but increased in late February and early March, and 500 (mixed) were seen at the south end of Seneca at that time (A. Robinson). An early Ring-neck was seen by Spofford on Cayuga on Mar 8. Not as many Goldeneyes were reported on Cayuga as in other winters. Two Buffleheads were at Union Springs on Mar 14 (Spofford). There were no Old-Squaws on Keuka this year, but five were seen on Cayuga on Feb 22 (Walker) and more were reported as March wore on. Reports of Scoters were almost completely absent on all lakes. Fewer reports this winter of Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, although 14 Commons were seen on the Chemung River on Jan 1.

Manager Morse of the Montezuma Federal Wildlife Refuge reports that the first waterfowl census of the year, taken on Mar 20 there, showed: Mallards 18, Blacks 11, Pintail 6, American Widgeon 4, Shoveller 6, Ring-necks 43, Canvasback 1, Scaup 1, Bufflehead 3, Hooded Merganser 11, Common Merganser 2, Red-breasted Merganser 1, Goldeneyes 20. The peak for the period, during the week of Mar 22 to 28, showed: Mallards 450, Blacks 550, Pintails 550, Green-winged Teal 4, American Widgeon 700, Shovellers 2, Wood Ducks 8, Ring-necks 40, Scaup 7, Goldeneyes 15, Hooded Mergansers 4, Red-breasted Merganser 1 (Total ducks 2,331).

Hawks — Owls: The Turkey Vulture was seen at Montezuma on Mar 31 (D. McIlroy). Again there have been almost no reports of Sharp-shinned Hawks, but one, possibly two, hung around the Aviary and feeding station at Sapsucker Woods Laboratory for a week in mid-January, as did a pair of Cooper's Hawks off and on during January and February. A Cooper's was seen at Avoca on Mar 20 and again Mar 30 (Carter). Red-tailed Hawks were reported regularly all winter. For example, the Laboratory of Ornithology census group tallied 14 of them on Jan 1. On Feb. 14 Spofford saw ten at Montezuma. Most interesting is the fact that Spofford also saw a pair nest-building in an oak near Union Springs on Feb 1. There was at least one egg in the nest on Mar 8, and the bird was incubating on Mar 14. This is the earliest egg date in Spofford's voluminous records. The first Red-shouldered Hawk returned to Sapsucker Woods on Mar 15. Compared to the last two years there were few Rough-legged Hawks this winter, although scattered reports came in, and Spofford saw four of them on Feb 14 at Montezuma. There was a small Hawk flight over Ithaca on Mar 24 — mostly Buteos and Sparrow Hawks. The pair of eagles at Montezuma was seen sitting on the nest on Nov 22, spotted briefly on Dec 13 (Morse), and then not reported again until Feb 22, when Spofford saw one over the storage pool. Two were present on Mar 14, and they were noted off and on at the nest in the next two weeks. They definitely were not incubating by the end of the month, although they have usually started sitting in late March in other years (Spofford).

An extremely interesting observation is reported by Manager Morse of Montezuma. On Mar 28 a first year Golden Eagle flew over the storage pond and was circled by the pair of White-headed Eagles. Morse at first thought the bird was a Rough-legged Hawk, but as the male White-head approached the other bird, it was evident that the newcomer was distinctly larger than the White-head, and was undoubtedly a Golden Eagle. This would be a first record of this species for the Cayuga Lake Basin. No reports of Peregrines. A Pidgeon Hawk was seen a little south of Branchport on Feb 3 (Spiker). None reported there last year.

Ruffed Grouse and Ring-necked Pheasants were scarce throughout the region, although the Chemung Valley census group reported seeing 24 Pheasants on Jan 1. Not one appeared in my hedges or yard all winter. Coots were missing from the south end of Cayuga this winter, except for an occasional individual. Twenty of them, however, were at the south end of Seneca from Feb 19 into March (Bardeen), and the first one appeared at Montezuma on Mar 14 (Morse).

Killdeer came in on time, in usual numbers. The first Woodcock at Ithaca was reported by Harold Cox on the Coddington Road on Mar 16, and this species has been reported at more stations this year than recently. The first one at Avoca was Mar 17 (Carter) and at Horseheads Mar 23 (Bates). An early report of a Pectoral Sandpiper is that from Avoca on Mar 26 (Carter).

No White-winged Gulls were reported this winter, but this may represent poor

coverage of the lakes and dumps. Great Black-backed Gulls were fewer at Ithaca — only nine seen on the Jan 1 census. One wintered at Watkins Glen on Seneca, and one was seen on Jan 18 at Penn Yan (Lerch et al). Until last year this Gull was a rare visitor on Keuka. The January first census at Ithaca likewise produced far fewer Herring Gulls (325) and somewhat fewer Ring-bills (8) than in past years (for example, in 1940 2500 Herring Gulls were counted).

Arthur Lane had a maximum number of 35 Mourning Doves at his station in Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary, as opposed to 60-80 the year before. In Avoca four appeared at a feeder on Mar 6. Screech Owls appeared to be scarce everywhere, and there were also fewer reports of Horned Owls. There was just one report of a Snowy Owl near Ithaca — in mid-January, on Hanshaw Road Extension (E. Adams). The Barred Owl was heard calling from time to time in Sapsucker Woods, and one was also reported from Mt. Pleasant, east of Ithaca, in January (L. Pearsall). A Long-eared Owl spent most of January and February on a slope behind Fernow Hall on the Cornell campus. Short-eared Owls were found by Scheider in the Canoga marshes on Jan 17.

Swifts — Shrikes: One wintering Belted Kingfisher was found, at Myers, on several occasions (D. G. Allen). Flickers wintered in small numbers, and came to feeders. Six were seen at once in Stewart Park in Ithaca in early January, feeding on wild fruits (Hoyt). Pileateds were reported at several new stations around Ithaca, and one pair appeared on the Cornell campus at intervals. One and possibly two Red-bellied Woodpeckers were seen regularly from Dec 14 on, in Stewart Park or just to the west, along Cayuga inlet, and these, with two found at Montezuma by W. Spofford, made a high count of probably four for the Ithaca census group on Jan 1. As the Cayuga Basin has not had the same number of Red-bellied Woodpeckers that the Onondaga region has had in the past couple of winters, this winter's report is encouraging. A Red-bellied was also found in Hornell from Nov 1 to Mar 30, in the same place as it was seen in 1951 (Groesbeck). In several areas it was noted that Downy Woodpeckers were scarcer this year. As Avoca this decrease was reported as 50 per cent (Carter).

Ithaca's first Phoebe was seen by Mrs. Doris Brann in Ellis Hollow on Mar 21. Prairie Horned Larks were not reported in January, but began appearing by the end of February, and on the weekend of Mar 27-30 were abundant.

Two most unusual reports are of Tree Swallows, in December and January. Jason Walker saw three of them on Dec 28, a few miles northwest of Waterloo, "insecting" over a small stream. They could not be found the next day. Twice during early January three were seen just north of Lyons (Spencer)

Most feeding station operators felt that Blue Jays had increased considerably, and I myself banded 12 in December and had one return of an old bird. And from my own observations around the countryside, Crows either have increased a lot, or have adopted new flight plans. Tufted Titmice were down slightly in numbers; one wintered on the Keuka College campus (Guthrie) and a few appeared at Ithaca feeders. There was a partial albino White-breasted Nuthatch at a feeder in Odessa in February (Graham). No reports of wintering Red-breasted Nuthatches. Brown Creepers fed regularly outside the Laboratory windows at Sapsucker Woods; elsewhere they were reported as scarce. There were fewer Carolina Wrens in the Ithaca region, but one wintered at Keuka successfully, one at Watkins Glen (Mrs. Louise Hope), one at Geneva (L. Ward) and one was seen by the Chemung Valley group on Jan 1. Winter Wrens were not reported from anywhere in the region. The Mockingbird was seen all winter at Esperanza (just north of Branchport), and one appeared for a short time at the Shepherd feeder at Ludlowville, then disappeared in January. A Brown Thrasher was seen in December in the Cornell Rose Garden (Gebhart).

Only one or two reports of Robins around Ithaca this winter, and few elsewhere in the region, except a "small flock" in the Glen area at Watkins Glen on Dec 7 (Brubaker). No Bluebirds by the end of March at Avoca, one at Reading Center on Mar 30 (Kopp), reported as scarce at Keuka (Guthrie), but cautiously we report that early Bluebirds have been somewhat more numerous this year in Ithaca area than last year (Hartshorne, Hoyt). Almost no Kinglet reports all winter. Cedar Waxwings were seen frequently and in numbers at Watkins Glen, Burdett, and

around Ithaca. Two Water Pipits were seen at Myers Pt., on Cayuga on Feb 28 and Mar 6 (Gebhart). A Northern Shrike spent the whole winter, through March, at the Gustav Swanson farm south of Ithaca and sang frequently. Spofford saw and heard one singing at Montezuma Feb 22 and again Mar 22, and one was seen n. e. of Sapsucker Woods on Jan 1 (A.A.A.). Otherwise unreported. A Loggerhead was seen at Horseheads on Mar 27 (Bates) and one near Sapsucker Woods Mar 31 (Hoyt).

Vireos — Sparrows: A Myrtle Warbler was seen near Seneca Lake at Watkins Glen on Dec 27 (Brubaker) and one at Indian Pines at the head of Keuka Lake on Jan 6 (Orcutt). Up to three were reported quite regularly in Stewart Park, Ithaca, all winter, but there were no feeding station reports this year.

The only winter Meadowlark report I received was of four near Interlaken on Jan 19 (Taylor Merrill), but they arrived in large numbers the last weekend in March. Only a couple of Redwings were seen during the winter, only a few Grackles, and no Rusties, but the wintering Icterid this year was the Cowbird. Everywhere in the region they were descending on feeders, especially in December and January. Malcolm Lerch banded almost 100 Cowbirds at Penn Yan in December. The Sapsucker Woods flock of 40 had dwindled to six or eight in early February, but I had 20 or so through February at Etna. An albino Cowbird was seen Jan 23 at Elmira (K. Fudge and Mary Smith). The first large flock of Grackles was reported Mar 3 (D. West). Cardinals were down somewhat in numbers in most places, although Mrs. Carter reports that they now seem well established at Avoca where none were known prior to 1948.

It was an odd year as far as Evening Grosbeaks were concerned, for while they were very abundant at some feeding stations, others, who normally have them in Grosbeak years, reported having none. They were much scarcer at Keuka and Penn Yan, but in fair numbers at Geneva, where sometimes they do not occur. At Avoca they were more numerous than they had ever been (Carter) and 100 Grosbeaks fed all winter at Hornell. They were at feeders in Odessa, Watkins Glen, and Montour Falls, but rarely at rural feeders there. My flock at Etna varied from 35-75, about the same as last year's.

The predominant Winter finch was the Purple Finch — although it was not until late January or early February that this was evident. Numerous calls were received at the Laboratory about "raspberry-colored birds" at feeders, and small flocks of them were found in sheltered areas. After Feb 15, they were found in small numbers at Avoca, and Hornell. Early in the reporting period, Pine Siskins were noted, but except at Keuka, there were not many of these later. The usual small flocks of Goldfinches occurred. The hoped-for Crossbill invasion did not occur, and Pine Grosbeaks were absent. There were just a few scattered reports of Redpolls. At least three Rufous-sided Towhees wintered in the region: one in Forest Home, Ithaca, one at Clifton Springs (Paris Trail) and one was seen Jan 1 at Elmira. A Vesper Sparrow was seen at Geneva Jan 12 (Smith). Juncos occurred in Avoca, where they do not usually winter (Carter), and they were in usual numbers elsewhere. Tree Sparrows were down in numbers at Ithaca, Etna, Keuka and Avoca. Mrs. Carter, at Avoca, reports that she fed 22 this winter, in contrast to her usual flock of 50, and that they were later in arriving, earlier in leaving. Julian Shepherd saw two Field Sparrows at Myers Pt. on Cayuga on Jan 8, and two were found at Elmira on Jan 1. One White-crowned Sparrow was seen in Geneva Dec 28 (P. Trail). Pair of White-throats were at the Huntington feeder east of Ithaca in December, one spent the first half of the winter at A. Lane's feeder at Sapsucker Woods, then disappeared, one was seen in Geneva on Jan 17 (Murdén) and a one-legged one appeared in Trumansburg during January (Townsend). Lane had the first Fox Sparrow reported on Mar 21, four were seen at Hornell on Mar 28, none appeared at Avoca. While a flock of 100 Snow Buntings was seen at Reading Center on Dec 28, another flock of 100 at Watkins Glen on Mar 4 (Beardsley), and another at Geneva on Jan 5 (Peck), no large flocks appeared this year; the largest number I saw at one time was ten.

Addition: Omitted from my report from the fall season, and worthy of mention now, is a Goshawk seen by David Allen over Connecticut Hill on Nov 10.

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