

## REGION 4 — SUSQUEHANNA

LESLIE E. BEMONT

It has been a decidedly cold winter with little snow. The only major snow storm came March 11 and 12 when about twelve inches fell. About five inches on Jan 16 takes second place. At Norwich and Bainbridge ice was the major hardship. It was the second coldest December on record and the coldest month of the season. Freezing temperatures or lower occurred every day of the month in Binghamton and on only ten days did the temperature go above freezing at all. Consequently what little snow fell lasted a long time and there were one to five inches on the ground at all times. January was closer to normal but still averaged on the cold side. Snow cover was almost as persistent as in December but was reduced to a trace several times, although it never disappeared. February was close to normal in temperature but was remarkable for the lack of snow. On few days in the month was there more than a trace of snow on the ground. March brought more snow than any other month, mostly as a result of the one big storm, but there were several minor snowfalls, too. Temperatures, although averaging below normal, were high enough so there was appreciable snow cover only a few days at a time. The coldness of the winter was largely a matter of persistence and average, rather than extremes, since there were only four days when the temperature went below zero in Binghamton and only six days at the weather station at Broome County Airport during the whole period.

There was a good flight of "winter finches", mainly Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins and Goldfinches, but most other species were represented, too. There was also a pretty good representation of species that normally winter farther south. The most surprising were a Parula Warbler and a Baltimore Oriole, but the number of wintering Robins and Cowbirds was noteworthy, too. The relatively light snow cover and the good fruit and seed crop of last fall were, no doubt, responsible for all but the most startling of the "laggards", but the former condition did not produce the Rough-legged Hawk records one might expect. The persistence of the December snow cover, rather than its depth, probably caused them to move farther on early in the season. This has been one of the most interesting winter seasons in recent years.

**Loons — Ducks:** No Loons and only one Horned Grebe was reported during the period. The grebe was on the Susquehanna River at Endicott from Mar 15 to 20 (Misner). A Pied-billed Grebe on the Susquehanna just west of Endicott Jan 11 (Bemont), was likewise the only one reported. There were no reports of wintering Great Blue Herons. The first migrant of the species was at the Whitney Point Flood Control Dam Mar 25 (N. Washburn, H. Marsi, Doren).

Fifty-five Canada Geese at Whitney Point Mar 16 (Linaberry, Marsi), the first ones reported, and four flocks heard flying over Oxford the night of Mar 19 (Stratton) are the highlights of a somewhat late, but so far fairly heavy flight. Wintering Mallards were about normal — 350 at the Sherburne Game Farm (Whites) and the usual small numbers here and there on the rivers of the region. Wintering Black Ducks showed a similar pattern, except there were only about 70 at the Sherburne Game Farm and about 50 at a second "headquarters" on the Susquehanna River just inside the western city line of Binghamton. A distinct increase in the number of both species was apparent in the reports from most parts of the region about Mar 20. Our first American Widgeons were two at Greene Mar 22 (Bartlett, Gilbert, Maxon). Twenty were on Little York Lake, near Homer, Mar 28 (Gustafson) and twenty more were at Whitney Point Dam Mar 29 (Sheffields, E.

Washburn, Saunders). A Pintail on the Susquehanna at Endicott Mar 4 was our first (Misner). There were no more reported until Mar 25, but on Mar 29 there were over 50 at Whitney Point (Sheffields, E. Washburn, Saunders), an unusually large concentration for this species in this region. A lone Green-winged Teal wintered at the Sherburne Game Farm (Whites), but our first migrant was one at Greene Mar 22 (Bartlett, Gilbert, Maxon). A male Wood Duck was found at Chenango Valley State Park, near Binghamton, Dec 28 on the Christmas Census (Sheffields) and another Wood Duck wintered at the Sherburne Game Farm (Whites). Five migrants were at Greene Mar 22 (Bartlett, Gilbert, Maxon).

Three Redheads were found Jan 18, during the Waterfowl Census, on the Susquehanna just inside the western Binghamton City Line (Hannans) and have not been reported since. Ring-necked Ducks were first found at Whitney Point Mar 25 (Marsi, N. Washburn, Doren). Four Canvasbacks were on the Susquehanna west of Endicott Jan 11 (Bemont). There were also two Feb records; two on the 18th at Homer (Gustafson) and five at Endicott on the 25th (Misner), and two Mar records. A female Lesser Scaup was reported from Homer Feb 18 (Gustafson). Eight Lessers were at Endicott Feb 25 and 26 (Misner) and a number of Scaup sp? reports came in during March, usually of four to six birds. The 57 Common Goldeneyes recorded during the Waterfowl Census indicate a comparatively high wintering population this year. In the Binghamton area reports show a definite increase in numbers early in March that spread to the rest of the region during the latter half of the month. Only one Old-squaw reported; that one on Little York Lake at Homer (Gustafson). Two male Hooded Mergansers at Deposit Mar 17 (Wilson) were our first. Many more were reported before the end of the period, the best numbers being twenty or so near Greene Mar 22 (Bartlett, Gilbert, Maxon). The 149 Common Mergansers recorded during the Waterfowl Census is the lowest total in four years.

**Hawks — Owls:** There were several Sharp-shinned Hawks reported during the period, but only two Cooper's Hawks; one on the south side of Binghamton Jan 26 (Marsi) and one at Unadilla Mar 26 (Wisner). The pair of Red-tailed Hawks that have nested on Ingraham Hill, south of Binghamton, in the past are nesting there again this year (Howard) but no other nests have been located so far. A Red-shouldered Hawk near Binghamton Mar 19 (Marsi, Doren) was our first. On Mar 28, after a good look with special attention paid to the tail bars, a Buteo was identified as a Broad-winged Hawk (Sheffields). This is about two and a half weeks earlier than the previous earliest record, but in Eaton's "Birds of New York" four of the local lists, including Eaton's own, list earlier first dates. In spite of the generally open winter there were no Rough-legged Hawks reported. There were no Marsh Hawks reported between the one south of Binghamton Dec 1 (L. Mackey) and the one at Whitney Point Mar 16 (Linaberry, Marsi). There were several more reported after the latter date. Two Killdeer on Mar 1 were our first; one at Kattelville (Sheffields) and one at Chenango Valley State Park (E. Washburn, Doren). They did not become common until Mar 19. Woodcock were at Choconut Center Mar 24 (Sheffields). A Glaucous Gull was reported in a field near Preble, in Cortland Co., Feb 3 (Heppell). The 48 Herring Gulls recorded on the Binghamton Christmas Census is the highest count of the season. Ring-billed Gulls were not recorded until Mar 4 at Binghamton (Sheffields).

A Mourning Dove was found between Sidney and Unadilla Jan 12 (Wisner) and another was at Newark Valley Feb 28 (Loomis). The one at McGraw Mar 19 (Horak) is more representative of the beginning of the main migration. Except for the two recorded on the Binghamton Christmas Census, Screech Owls were unreported during the period. There were quite a few Horned Owls reported from various parts of the region. A Snowy Owl was seen near Lisle, in Broome Co., Mar 29 (Yeatman). There was another report of a "big, dirty white bird" Dec 30 from near Binghamton. A Barred Owl was seen near Deposit Dec 2 (Wilson). A Saw-whet Owl, unrecorded from the region in the last seven years, was seen Jan 6 and heard Feb 17 near Deposit (Wilson).

**Goatsuckers — Shrikes:** There were several reports of Belted Kingfishers; only from Jan 19 to Mar 14 were we without them. Besides the four recorded on the Binghamton Christmas Census wintering Flickers were reported Jan 10 at Choconut Center (Sheffields) and Feb 15 in Binghamton (Doren). One at Kattelville Mar 1 may

have been a migrant but they were still not common at the end of the period. Pileated Woodpeckers were reported fairly frequently from several parts of the region and are apparently increasing. A Red-headed Woodpecker in a sugar bush at McGraw Mar 25 (Wilson) is believed to have been around all winter.

A Phoebe was seen just a few miles south of the Pennsylvania border Mar 21 (Washburns) but they were first seen on the New York side Mar 29, one near Windsor (Nielsen) and one near Maine (Beaver), but no more were found in the next two days. Horned Larks were inconspicuous until a flock of 30 was reported near the Broome County Airport Feb 5 but they were reported frequently after that. A flock of 25 reported from Bainbridge Mar 22 (E. J. Smith) was probably made up of either migrants or local birds whose nests were destroyed by the Mar 11-12 snowfall since actively nesting birds would probably be more dispersed. Five or so Tree Swallows seen at Windsor Mar 28 (Nielsen) were the only ones reported in March.

Blue Jays have been much more common than usual in Bainbridge (E. J. Smith), Unadilla (Wisner), Binghamton and Deposit (Wilson). Mr. Wilson banded 166 of them during the period. At Binghamton 299 were counted on the Christmas census where the previous high was 134 the Christmas of 1954. At Deposit Crows were also unusually common (Wilson). At Binghamton they were also quite common but not much more so than in previous peak years. At Unadilla Black-capped Chickadees were "not especially numerous" (Wisner) but in Binghamton the Christmas Census figures show a peak year — 459 as compared to the previous high of 412 the Christmas of 1957. A Tufted Titmouse has been around the house of Mr. S. Wilson near Deposit since Feb 16. On Mar 20 and again the next day a Tufted Titmouse was found near Willow Point, across the river from Johnson City, a new location (Washburns). Several Red-breasted Nuthatches were reported in late December and early January, the last one Jan 11 a little north of Binghamton (Benyi). They were next reported Mar 8 at Maine, in Broome Co., where four or more were found together (Beaver).

A Winter Wren was at Port Dickinson, just north of Binghamton, Dec 14 (Dechen) and one was found on the Binghamton Christmas Census at Chenango Valley State Park Dec 28 (Sheffields). At Norwich one was seen Jan 14, Feb 26 and Feb 27 (Whites). No Carolina Wrens. There were twenty-four reports of Robins from Dec 1 to Feb 28; seven in Dec, twelve in Jan and five in Feb. Only the reports of 16 in a flock just north of Binghamton in January (L. Young) and 10-15 in Unadilla from Feb 12 to 15 involved more than three birds. The one at Homer Feb 28 (Roy) was probably the first reported migrant. They could be seen in good numbers from Mar 8 on, but it wasn't until Mar 18 that they became really common. Four early Bluebirds were reported in Binghamton Feb 23 (P. Wall). They were next seen north of Binghamton Mar 20 (Marsi, Doren) and there have been a fair number of reports from several parts of the region since, but at Cortland, Deposit and Norwich, all areas covered by active observers, there were none reported before the end of the period. At Deposit Golden-crowned Kinglets were fairly common all winter (Wilson), but at Binghamton there were very few reported after Jan 4. On Dec 12 a Ruby-crowned Kinglet was at Port Dickinson (Dechen) and another was found on the Binghamton Christmas Census (Hannans). There were many reports of flocks of Cedar Waxwings numbering up to 72 birds in a flock until Jan 27; however a flock of 50 at Sidney Feb 16 (E. J. Smith) was the only report between Jan 27 and Mar 14. There were only seven Northern Shrike reports, four of them from Oxford (Stratton). An immature was banded Dec 10 at Deposit (J. Wilson) and one was collected near Oneonta Mar 21 (J. New). The other one was at Whitney Point Mar 25 (H. Marsi, N. Washburn, J. Doren).

**Vireos — Warblers:** On Dec 3 a Parula Warbler was found in Endwell in such a weakened condition that it could easily be caught by hand when cornered in a garage. It was kept in a cage inside the house and fed peanut butter, suet and meal worms. It apparently regained its strength but about a month later it weakened and died (Raiter). The specimen was turned over to Cornell University. A Myrtle Warbler was seen and heard singing in Cortland Mar 24 (Hall).

**Blackbirds — Sparrows:** Three reports of wintering Meadowlarks; one at Homer Dec 6 (Gustafson) was perhaps a late migrant, one at St. John's Pond north of Binghamton Jan 2 (Saunders) and one at Sidney Jan 18 (Wisner). The first spring

migrant was near Choconut Center Mar 1 (Sheffields). Reports were scattered until Mar 22 when a flock of 100 was found near Bainbridge (E. J. Smith) and from then on they were common. One Red-winged Blackbird stayed at Unadilla until Dec 3 (Wisner). No more until Feb 20 when one was in south Binghamton (Schmidt). Then Feb 28 some were at Newark Valley (Loomis) and three were at the IBM Country Club (Carter). After that they became numerous with the females appearing about Mar 22. A "nicely plumaged male" Baltimore Oriole was still at Unadilla Dec 14 feeding on apples left on the tree (Wisner). A Rusty Blackbird was found Dec 28 near Greene (Bartlett, Gilbert, Maxon) and another was at Norwich Dec 31 where it was seen again Jan 8 (Whites). The first reported spring migrant was at Greene Mar 22 (Bartlett, Gilbert, Maxon). Two Common Grackles were found on the Binghamton Christmas Census Dec 28 and two more were seen in Johnson City Jan 3 (Wilkins). There were no more until Mar 1 when two were at Endwell (Bemont). They became really common after Mar 21. There was an unusual number of winter Cowbird records. A flock of 30 was at Norwich Dec 20 (Whites), and another flock of 30 was at Maine Feb 22 (Beaver). A flock of about that number made irregular visits to a feeder in Binghamton most of the period (Morehouse). They were becoming numerous at Unadilla Mar 19 (Wisner). At Deposit 147 were banded during March (Wilson).

It was another big Evening Grosbeak year. At Cortland they were more common than last year (Gustafson), and at Deposit 780 were banded during the period (Wilsons). Around Binghamton they did not seem to be quite as common as last year and it was almost mid January before they were coming to feeders regularly. There have been many more reports than usual of Purple Finches around Binghamton all during the period. Total numbers were small during December, January and February but they were becoming more numerous during March. At Deposit 72 were banded during the period, 55 of them in March (Wilsons). They didn't appear at Unadilla until Feb 28 or at Oneonta until mid March (J. New). Some Pine Grosbeaks were just outside Oneonta at the end of February but then disappeared (J. New). A few were reported around Binghamton and Oxford in the middle of March. At the latter location a large noisy flock of mixed finches, including Pine Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, Redpolls and perhaps Crossbills and Goldfinches, was observed feeding in the treetops of a birch, maple, hemlock woods (Stratton). There were no other reports of Redpolls during the period, but Pine Siskins have been quit common since five were found on the Binghamton Christmas Census Dec 28. Several rather large flocks were reported and on Mar 29 a "huge" mixed flock of Siskins and Goldfinches was found at Whitney Point (Sheffields, E. Washburn, Saunders). Goldfinches were unusually common throughout the period. 351 were recorded on the Binghamton Christmas Census. This compares with the previous high of 70 the Christmas of 1953. There have been a number of White-winged Crossbill reports from Norwich, Sherburne, Pitcher in Cortland Co., Oxford and Oneonta. The first ones were at Norwich Feb 17 (Whites). They were still present in several areas at the end of the period.

A Rufous-sided Towhee spent the winter at a feeder in Newark Valley (Durie) and another was found near Binghamton Mar 1 (H. Marsi). No more before the end of the period. Slate-colored Juncoes were about normal in numbers, but as usual were unevenly distributed so that at Bainbridge (E. J. Smith) and Unadilla (Wisner) they were rather scarce. Tree Sparrows were normal. There were three reports of wintering Field Sparrows; four Jan 11 west of Endicott with a flock of Tree Sparrows (Bemont), one at a feeder in Unadilla Jan 18 (Wisner) and one banded at Deposit Jan 27 (Wilsons). Dec 3 a White-throated Sparrow was banded in south Binghamton (H. Marsi). On Dec 28 one was found during the Binghamton Christmas Census at Chenango Valley State Park (Sheffields) and Jan 11 one was at a feeder in Endicott (Bemont). For the first time a Fox Sparrow was found on the Binghamton Christmas Census Dec 28 (Wilkins) and around the 10th of Jan one was at a feeder just north of Binghamton (Benyi). An unusually heavy Fox Sparrow migration was first recorded in Deposit Mar 12 (Wilsons) and has since spread to most other areas and lasted to at least the end of the month. Top count so far was twelve, some singing, at State Park Mar 21 (Sheffields). Most areas reported wintering Song Sparrows. The first one heard singing was at Endicott Feb 10 (Carter). They became common around Mar 8 at Binghamton. Small flocks of Snow Buntings were

reported all during the period. The largest flock reported was 200 or more at Unadilla Jan 7 (Wisner).

A report of a small flock of Red Crossbills at Sempronius, in Cortlad Co., on Nov 29 (Wilson) was received too late to go in the last issue.

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## REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

FRITZ SCHEIDER

Winter was rough, cold, and snowy, early in coming and late in leaving. Dec saw 9-18 inches of snow from the last three days of Nov and introduced a bout of unremitting cold (9.7 degrees/day lower than normal) and considerable cumulative ground snow (20 inches in excess). Beaver Lake froze by Dec 7, Oneida Lake by Dec 8 and snow at Oswego made national headlines and local winter-long trouble. Late Dec saw slight relief in a three-day thaw but Jan promptly negated this and added fresh insult, snow (48 inches), and cold. Feb had similar cold but normal snowfall; an extensive thaw occurred in the last week of Feb. Severe cold weather in the first half of Mar froze the flooded marshes *solid* and various creekside flooded areas, usually excellent for ducks, became masses of jammed and jumbled ice. The remainder of Mar saw more snow (twice the normal amount to add to a near-record total of 137 inches) and very gradual thawing with minimal flooding and little migration in effect. The spring flight to date (Mar 31) has been marked by discouraged ducks seeking open water, icterids seeking snow-free fields, and birders seeking Bluebirds; all of the above have been awarded with little of the sought.

Despite the very rugged winter, the number of wintering half-hardies was amazing. Perhaps the late Nov snow and/or the early Dec freezing and storms grounded many of this group or forced them to seek food and shelter for such a prolonged period that subsequent migratory activity was nil. Whatever the cause, the winter of '58-'59 will go down as an outstanding one for half-hardies, e.g. all three mimids, Long-billed Marsh and Winter Wrens, Myrtle Warbler, Killdeer. Christmas counts at Syracuse (66 species, Dec 21) and Oswego-Fulton (44 species, Jan 1) and Dr. Burt's weekly feeder surveys for Jan, Feb, and Mar gave proof to the presence, and in the latter case, to the persistence of many half-hardies. Also outstanding thru this season were 1) the winter finch flight which became progressively better thru Feb and Mar, 2) the numbers of wintering dabblers, and 3) a fair Northern Shrike flight. On the negative side were 1) poor counts of certain diving ducks (Canvasback, Redhead, Oldsquaw), 2) low tallies of wintering Buteos, and 3) an extremely meager "white-winged" gull flight.

Notable rarities for the season were Franklin's Gull, Goshawk, Black-backed Woodpecker, and Oregon Junco.

**Loons-Ducks:** No wintering Loons. Red-necked Grebe: singles at Oswego Harbor, Jan 18 and 25, and at Fulton, Mar 14. Horned Grebe: winter numbers down with a high of three at Oswego and of 31 on Skaneateles Lake. Pied-billed Grebe: two wintered at Fulton, **none** at Oswego; a grounded Pied-billed at Baldwinsville in the third week of Dec is reminiscent of the grounded grebes of Feb '58 and points to severe freezing to the north. Great Blue Heron: three wintering along Carpenter Brook west of Camillus, Jan 2-11; first migrants on Mar 15.