

than 15 to 20 feet in height, with the legs dangling, and with a rather awkward flight. It gave at these times a short cackle and would drop to the creek and then disappear. Although we knew its approximate location and even tried to come up on it, we were unable to flush it a second time.

Early in January we enlisted the aid of two other observers, Kate Palmer and Dorothy Baker, both amateur ornithologists, both of whom were familiar with the Virginia Rail from previous observations. They, both, observed this bird feeding and then disappear from sight. My wife and I, on two separate occasions, approached within ten feet of the bird. It was wary but apparently not near as afraid as on prior occasions. It fed downstream through the open water, wading a few steps at a time, evidently feeding on vegetation and water insects as well as scattered grain. Throughout this entire period of time the Genesee River was completely frozen over and only an area of about 150 yards of our stream was not frozen. On occasions, the bird crossed both snow and ice, leaving tracks that we noted were larger than those of a hen pheasant.

Dr. Eaton planned to visit us on January 25, but a blizzard developed and temperatures dropped to 20 degrees below zero, so he did not come. We advised him we would let him know when conditions were favorable again for observation.

The weather worsened. On February 14 a neighbor reported having seen the bird in flight as it traveled some 100 yards or more. On checking we found tracks a considerable distance upstream from where it had been feeding. On going downstream we found tracks appearing through drifted snow from a hole about four inches in diameter, and one could see the mark of wing feathers in the snow. The tracks led to open water and then disappeared. This was the last date that we can presume the bird to have been alive.

On February 19 we had a quick thaw and temperatures rose to 40 degrees. The entire creek drifted over on February 16, 17 and 18. As my wife walked the creek on February 19, she found the King Rail lying dead in what had been its sheltered area under the overhanging snow. The snow had collapsed from sheer weight and the rail was apparently suffocated. The bird was sent to Dr. Stephen W. Eaton at St. Bonaventure University, who reported that it had a full digestive tract containing water plants and animal life. The specimen is now in the permanent collection of that University.

Lou L. Burton, John Street, Belmont

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WINTER SEASON DECEMBER 1 - MARCH 31 DAVID B. PEAKALL

The winter was extremely severe throughout the most of the state, prolonged cold was general and there were record snowfalls in some areas. In the northern part of the state there was virtual standstill in activity due to snow. Frank Clinch remarks that "roads became canyons too narrow for parking and often too deep to see even the tops of trees a hundred yards away."

For most of the winter it was extremely poor for winter finches; then in February a large invasion of Purple Finches occurred. This movement effected the entire state, but it was much less marked on Long Island. A wider canvas is necessary to determine the origin of this movement, although the flight was later in the lower Hudson valley than elsewhere. Associated with this invasion was a moderate flight of Pine Siskins and in some areas small to moderate numbers of Evening Grosbeaks.

The Hawk-Owl is a species that rarely invades our area. During the winter nine individuals were reported from six regions, mainly from the more northern areas. It is difficult to compare this invasion with those of many

years ago but I have not been able to find any evidence to suggest that the invasions of 1894-5 and 1922-3 were as large as that of this winter.

The Mourning Dove has been steadily increasing as a wintering species and several regions reported high counts despite the weather. The average number of Mourning Doves per Christmas count for those counts which have been carried out annually are given below. They are averaged in four year periods.

	1958-61	1954-57	1950-53	1946-49
Long Island (3 counts)	118	62	45	6
Rest of state (11 counts)	31	16	6	5

In 1946-7, 63 Mourning Doves were recorded on 26 counts and in 1961-62, 2560 on 41 counts; even allowing for increased numbers of observers this represents a very considerable increase.

The rarest bird seen was a Green-tailed Towhee which spent the winter at a feeder in Ithaca. This is the first record for the state, although there have been a number of records for the eastern United States. The bird was seen by hundreds of observers and was well photographed. I hope that the absence of a specimen does not preclude it from the state list. It is difficult to see how collecting it would add to the definitive status of this record. Other rarities included a Varied Thrush at Tarrytown and Lesser Black-backed Gull on the lower Hudson.

The Blue Grosbeaks reported from the Catskills in the last issue were observed there in December and February. The species is most unusual in the area even in summer but in the winter it is not normally present anywhere in the United States. Another unusual winter record was a party of Indigo Buntings in Dutchess county in December.

Three Fulvous Tree-ducks were shot from a flock of six or eight of this species on Long Island. An interesting but not totally unexpected record in view of recent dramatic changes in the late autumnal dispersal of this species (Baird, Audubon Field Notes 17:6-8, 1963). On the other hand the few records of the Chestnut-collared Longspur for the state are old, but one was observed in a flock of Lapland Longspurs in region eight.

To finish on a more spring-like note, there was a good flight of Whistling Swans in the western part of the state. The flight of Canada Geese was excellent in the western and central parts of the state, numbers in the major concentration areas at the end of March totalled nearly two hundred thousand. Associated with this flight were a larger number of Blue Geese than are normally reported. A Barnacle Goose was seen in region one.

Upstate Medical Center, 766 Irving Ave., Syracuse 10