

## A WINTER POPULATION BIRD STUDY — 14 YEAR SUMMARY

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The study of bird populations is largely a twentieth century phenomenon. It is typified by the well known "Christmas Count" sponsored by the National Audubon Society. Valuable data is also being accumulated as a result of roadside counts and breeding bird censuses that have been undertaken in recent years.

The Winter Population Bird Study carried out for the past twenty-two years under the aegis of the National Audubon Society has not assumed wide popularity. A review of reports on this study, published each year in the June issue of *Audubon Field Notes* indicates that very few of these studies have been carried out in New York State.

In 1954 I selected an area of twenty-eight acres near Gouverneur, N.Y. and began a Winter Population Bird Study in December of that year. This study was continued each winter through 1967-68 and the results are summarized here.

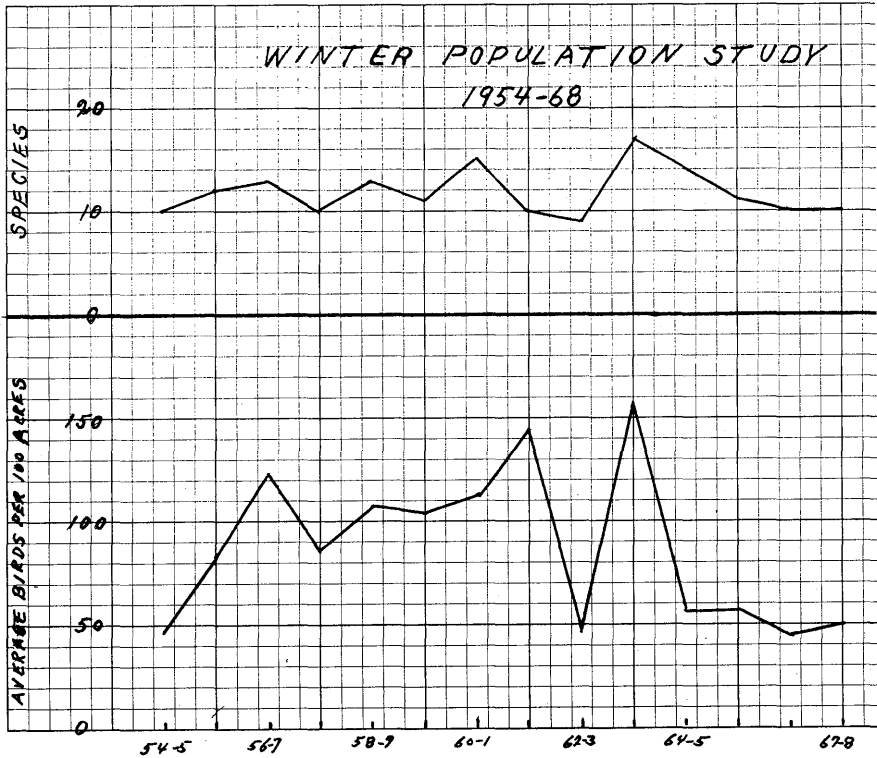
The rules for this study are simple; several trips, preferably eight or more, are made in the selected area during mid-winter. All birds are counted and the average density determined. For comparative purposes the results are expressed in terms of birds per one hundred acres.

The area under discussion (see AFN Vol. 9 #3 p. 295-6) is surrounded on three sides by water and on the fourth by an open field. Most of the twenty-eight acres is wooded or brush covered, but includes an open field of three or four acres. Much of the woodland consists of hemlock, with lesser amounts of maple, elm, basswood and yellow birch. In places the undergrowth is thick with young hemlock or maple saplings. Speckled alder is found in a swampy area adjacent to the Oswegatchie River. Elevations vary from 420 to 480 feet above sea level. Two mammals frequently noted were the Cottontail Rabbit and the Red Squirrel. Although there are a number of homes in the vicinity, the area is infrequently visited in the winter. I encountered dogs on only two or three occasions.

The period of observation is roughly eight weeks beginning in mid-December. Trips averaged twelve per season. Density (average birds per 100 acres) varied considerably, with a high in 1963-4 and lows in three winters (see Figure 1).

Although the study is not primarily concerned with the variety of species found, this aspect is nonetheless of interest. During the fourteen years of observation, thirty-four species were listed. The largest number in one season was seventeen (see Figure 1). Eight species, seen on all or most of the fourteen years, are considered "regulars." These are the Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Hairy Woodpecker, Ruffed Grouse, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Evening Grosbeak, and

Figure 1



Brown Creeper. Another group, of less frequent occurrence, includes the American Goldfinch, Tree Sparrow, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and Horned Owl.

The remaining twenty-two species can be considered sporadic. These are the Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Starling, Pileated Woodpecker, Common Redpoll, Pine Siskin, Snow Bunting, Purple Finch, Herring Gull, Northern Shrike, Sharp-shinned Hawk, White-throated Sparrow, Cooper's Hawk, Winter Wren, Black Duck, Song Sparrow, Slate-colored Junco, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Common Crow, Robin, Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker and Buteo Hawk. Eight of these were represented by a single individual seen during the entire study. It is of interest that except for one winter, the Hairy Woodpecker was noted more frequently than the Downy Woodpecker.

The visitor of greatest interest to me was the Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker, seen during two winters prior to 1960. A bird of this species was also seen in the area in November 1965 prior to the period of study. It is obvious from the results of their work that these woodpeckers were attracted by food found under the bark of dead hemlocks,

several being stripped of outer bark. The great majority of the Evening Grosbeaks recorded were birds flying over the area. Most of my observations were made during the first hour of daylight and it was soon apparent that the grosbeaks had a night roost to the south, and each morning headed for feeding stations in the village of Gouverneur.

The Horned Owl was resident in the area during five winters. Usually only one bird was seen, but on January 17, 1965, with the temperature sixteen degrees below zero, five crows were mobbing a pair of Horned Owls. Incidentally this was the only winter that crows were observed in the area.

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## BREEDING BIRD SURVEY NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

Once again it is time to plan for the Fish and Wildlife Survey's Breeding Bird Survey for June. The number of routes as yet not committed has been reduced to 17. These routes lie primarily in the Adirondack Forest Preserve, or on its fringes.

They are.

|            |                   |            |
|------------|-------------------|------------|
| Dannemora  | Waddington        | Clinton    |
| Stark      | Inlet             | McKeever   |
| Sevey      | Newcomb           | MacDougall |
| Wanakena   | Blue Ridge, south | Cayuga     |
| Edwards    | Old Forge         | Laurens    |
| Ogdensburg | Blue Ridge, north |            |

Observers and assistants are needed for these routes. Coverage takes only one-half day at the observer's convenience any day during June. To qualify, an observer should be capable of identifying by sight and sound 95 percent of the species expected in the area. If anyone wants more details, or wishes to volunteer, please contact me. In addition, if anyone knows someone who does not receive this publication, who might be interested, please have him or her contact me.

One need not live immediately in the count area. Some of the Adirondack counts that are already covered are taken by people who have summer cottages in the Forest Preserve. Since Adirondack birding is quite different from that elsewhere in the state, and, can be refreshingly rewarding, why not consider a weekend stay in the mountains with the coverage of one of these more remote routes as the highlight of the weekend? It should prove to be an interesting change of pace and scenery.

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## CONSERVATION NEWS

MAXWELL C. WHEAT, JR.

The dynamic concept of "certain unalienable rights" for all men has streamed through our history as at various times people have become personally and emotionally aware of their rights. Women got the feeling of their rights—and fought for them, as have workmen and other groups.

Now conservationists have been getting the feeling of their rights—set