

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WINTER SEASON

December 1–March 31

DAVID B. PEAKALL

There was a major invasion of Bohemian Waxwings this winter, a flight comparable with those of 1961/62 and 1958/59. It is not surprising that invasions of this species are infrequent since its breeding range in North America is almost entirely west of the 100° meridian. Bohemian Waxwings were reported in six regions, being absent only in the southern and southeastern portions of the state and the Adirondacks. The first record was on December 8th, at Sandy Pond along the shores of Lake Ontario, but maximum numbers did not occur until late winter. The high count, 500 near Watertown, was a record for the state. In contrast, the Cedar Waxwing was scarce over much of the state.

There was a heavy, early flight of Evening Grosbeaks. On Long Island it was described as “easily this area’s largest ever” but it “was all but over by late December.” This seemed to be the general pattern although the Syracuse feeder survey showed that the feeder population of that area was sustained all winter. There was a moderate-good flight of Pine Grosbeaks and, in general, the numbers of this species were better sustained than those of the Evening Grosbeak. The Redpoll was also recorded in good numbers in some areas and a few Hoary Redpolls were recorded.

Several regional reports mentioned the scarcity of Blue Jay. A check of the regular Christmas counts within the state shows that the last sharp decline was in the winter of 1961/62. In that winter the total reported was only 43% of the ten year average and was only 38% of the total of the previous year. In the following winter the numbers were back up to, or even a little above, normal. Limited information from further south suggests movement rather than heavy mortality. Bemont comments that “the very real scarcity of Blue Jay seems to be explained by the poor mast crop last fall.”

A sharp reduction in the number of Canvasbacks was noted in several upstate regions. The possibility of a closed season for this species should be seriously considered. The early spring flight of Canada Geese appeared to be larger than ever and the number of Blue Geese has also increased.

December 21 was a “red-letter day” on Long Island, both for late dates of shore-birds and for rarities off-shore. Observations off Captree suggest that either our knowledge of movements there is deficient or that Ryan was exceptionally fortunate.

Rarities included Gyrfalcon (Region 5), Lesser Black-backed Gull (3 & 10), Kittiwake (3), Sabine’s Gull (10), Hawk Owl (7), Varied Thrush (8 & 10), and Harris’s Sparrow (1).

Langmuir Laboratory, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

Abbreviations used in regional reports: arr—arrival, arrived; Co—County; imm—immature; L—Lake; max—maximum one-day count; mob—many observers; Pk—Park; Pt—Point; R—River; Rd—Road.

All numbers given are the number of individuals unless otherwise stated.

REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

ROBERT A. SUNDELL

The winter was a fairly mild one with none of the record-breaking cold spells that characterized the first half of January, 1968. During December the temperature was about one degree above the long-term average and precipitation was slightly less than one half inch above the average. Weather conditions during January and February were fairly typical for the area, although there was less snow than usual during February. The typical winter meteorologic pattern, however, persisted throughout the first half of March and as a result very little thawing took place prior to this time and also very little land bird migration. Most water remained frozen solid until well into the second half of March and this factor also affected negatively both land bird and water bird migration.

In a reversal of the general pattern of the last several years, water birds were below normal in terms of the number of species, individuals and rarities noted, while the land birds were definitely up in these categories. The following trends were determined: (1) small numbers of loons and grebes, (2) early Whistling Swans migrating on February 21 but a maximum of only 200 and no large concentrations in Southern Tier localities where over 1000 were counted last March, (3) a continuing increase in the number of Blue Geese in the Oak Orchard area late in March with a high count of 98, (4) modest counts of most species of waterfowl but exceptionally low numbers of Canvasback and Oldsquaw and an all-time high of 1100 Bufflehead, (5) a modest early spring hawk flight commencing during the third week of February and peaking about one month later, (6) fewer interesting gull records than in most recent years, (7) continuing dispersal of the Red-bellied Woodpecker, (8) more Tufted Titmice than usual including a significant increase in Allegany County, (9) the continuing trend toward successful wintering of the Mockingbird, (10) the spectacular number of Cardinals recorded on area Christmas Counts, (11) a superb flight of winter finches featuring the Evening and Pine Grosbeaks and the Common Redpoll but with only two Red Crossbills and no White-winged, (12) a fine showing of many sparrows, particularly the Slate-colored Junco and Tree Sparrow.

Rare species reported were Mute Swan, Harlequin Duck, Purple Sandpiper, Bohemian Waxwing, Dickcissel, Hoary Redpoll, Oregon Junco and Harris' Sparrow.

Abbreviations: ACCC — Allegany County Christmas Count; Alleg Rd — Allegany Road, Hanover Township, Chautauqua County; Bflo — Buffalo; BISP — Beaver Island State Park; BOSCC — Buffalo Ornithological Society Christmas Count; CC — Christmas Count; Chaut — Chautauqua; INWR — Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge; Nia — Niagara; Ont — Ontario; OOCMA — Oak Orchard Game Management Area; TGMA — Tonawanda Game Management Area.

Contributors: RFA — Robert F. Andrie; HHA — Harold H. Axtell; CB — Clarence Beal; PB — Paul Benham; TLB — Thomas L. Bourne; LDB — Lou and Doris Burton; AC — Arthur Clark; DD — Dorothy Danner; FE — Flora Elderkin; AF — Arthur Freitag; GI — Gregory Inskip; LFK — Lewis F. Kibler; JK — Joseph Kikta; WHK — Walter and Harriette Klabunde; CK — Clarence Klingensmith; VL — Virgil Lunardini; WAM — Willard and Alice McKale; HDM — Harold D. Mitchell; ECP — Elizabeth C.