

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WINTER SEASON

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December and January seemed like an extension of the rather warm fall and great numbers of half-hardy species lingered in snowless coverts, especially cedar thickets, or at the numerous feeders. With February, winter returned with impressive snow and persistent cold, a condition that prevailed virtually throughout March. The result was the death of many wintering individuals and the decimation of certain species (Winter and Carolina Wrens, Swamp Sparrow) and such a residuum of ice that March waterfowl were hard pressed to find open water in which to feed and rest. The repetitive theme of half-hardy species crops up in numerous places, i.e., markedly increased numbers of wintering Canada Geese (3,5,6,9) and increased numbers of wintering dabblers such as Gadwall (1,3,5,9) and American Widgeon (1,3). Similarly the multiple records of wintering Hermit Thrush (1,2,4,5,8,9), Brown Thrasher (1,2,3,4,5,8,9), Catbird (1,2,3,5,8,9), and Eastern Bluebird (1,2,3,8,9) document the widespread response of half-hardies to milder, particularly reduced snow, conditions.

Most diving ducks seemed average but Redheads were specifically noted as increased in 2 and 3; most mergansers were strongly reduced in 2,5, and 8. Hawks presented a mixed picture — only Red-tailed Hawk numbers seemed increased across the state but reports of the smaller Accipiters and Rough-legged Hawk were increased in the western areas (1,2,3). No significant Goshawk invasion was noted.

In keeping with the very mild December, both Virginia Rail and Sora were reported upstate (3,5) and higher counts of Mourning Dove were widely noted (1,2,5,8,9). Both Glaucous Gull (1,2,5,6,9) and Iceland Gull (1,2,5,6,8,9) numbers seemed increased but this was not a function of the cold of the latter half of the winter as both species were present thru the season.

A definite incursion of Snowy Owls (1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9) ensued and lesser numbers of Short-eared Owls were reported in the western regions (1,2,3, with a few in 5 & 9). Rare owls were just that — rare. Perhaps in keeping with the mild weather, perhaps parallelling the rising numbers of wintering Mourning Dove, more Yellow-shafted Flickers were reported (3,5,9) and despite the subsequent cold and deep snow, the species did seem to persist. A minimal incursion (a minirruption!) of Boreal Chickadees produced records in 1,3,5, and 8. The number of wintering Robins was uniformly impressive and virtually all accounts except for Adirondack sectors mention them. Likewise virtually all regions noted numerous wintering Icterids with most commenting that the Eastern Meadowlark faded with the heavy snows of early February and the all too common Brown-headed Cowbird readily transferred from the waste grain of corn-

fields to the largesse of feeding stations with consummate ease.

Even warblers responded to the warmer weather of early winter with multiple upstate records of Myrtle Warbler and Ovenbird in Region 1 and 2 and a Palm Warbler in Region 8.

The dominant avian event of '71-'72, however, must be awarded to the heavy incursions of winter finches — all sectors reported notable invasions of Evening Grosbeaks and Common Redpolls (plus a few Hoary Redpolls) with good numbers of Eastern Goldfinch and Pine Siskins too. White-winged and Red Crossbills were widespread (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9) but numbers were much lower and in certain areas you had to frankly hunt for them to log them in January, February, and March. Pine Grosbeaks were quite spotty, being apparently most common in the Adirondack and Adirondack fringe counties. House Finches continue their spread (1,2,4,5,8) which spread, I suspect, is most readily documented when winter hunger drives them to feeders for sustenance and survival — and corroborating photographs! And a prophecy out of Region 10 is already fulfilled — the Monk Parakeet, a frugivorous pest from South America, has been reported in Region 4 and 8 and I already know of a spring record of this species from the Ontario lakeshore.

If you didn't like chasing frigid fringillids this season, you could always scuttle from feeder to feeder checking on visiting western birds. Winter '71-'72 could well be labeled the winter of the western waifs and some of the greatest rarities of the season are in this group — Sage Thrasher (6), Varied Thrush (4,5), Bohemian Waxwing (3,5), Black-headed Grosbeak (5), Dickcissel (1,2,3,5,9), Oregon Junco (1,2,3,5,8,9) and Harris' Sparrow (2,5). Other rarities for the season include Glossy Ibis (1), Barrow's Golden-eye (5), Pomarine Jaeger (1). Lesser Black-backed Gull (3), Black-headed Gull (1), Black-legged Kittiwake (2), Boreal Owl (2), Black-backed Woodpecker (6,8), Bobolink (5), Lincoln's Sparrow (9), and Grasshopper Sparrow (3).

My compliments to the editors of Regions 1 thru 9; regrettably the Region 10 account was not available. C'est dommage!

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The Region 10 report unfortunately was received too late to be included in Dr. Scheider's Highlights. It is, however, a part of this volume.

Ed.