

hand. In either case they can be fondled, grasped, tweaked and given a thorough examination (things they will not otherwise tolerate) with nothing more than an eye-blink as response. After 3 or 4 minutes they return, as alert self-possessed and rambunctious as before. Nuthatches and Downy Woodpeckers, when they are around, seem to fall into and out of the spell at the same time. I am satisfied they are not watching a predator, as they seem to act differently in that case. Ornithologists I have contacted have not been able to account for this behavior, but mention that it seems similar to the catatonic state which birds sometimes go into when being handled, as during banding. One suggestion was that it may be a similar metabolic mechanism to cope with extreme cold as has been observed in mice and shrews, but my notes do not seem to bear this out. I would be very interested to learn if other readers of the *Kingbird* have made similar observations.

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WINTER SEASON

FRITZ SCHEIDER

December, January, and February produced a mild form of winter but March was a brutal spring with statewide (except Region 9) snow and ice storms and severe freezing in the latter half of that month. Migration, normally picking up in that period, was essentially squashed and attempted migration, particularly of waterfowl, stalled by the miserable weather. The combination of poor cone and seed crops plus limited gasoline for birding produced large numbers of feeder birding reports and the feeder-dependent half-hardies of the season had above average tabulation (q.v.)

The very mild December and January weather probably accounts for the attempted wintering by American Bittern (1,5,6,9) and the above average sprinkling of half-hardy ducks (1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9). A very strong Whistling Swan migration (1,2,3,5 with a stray in 9) was grounded by the severe storms of mid and late March. Redhead and Canvasback presented a mixed bag (no pun intended) with some areas reporting increases, others record lows. Greater Scaup showed reduced numbers where mentioned (1,2,3,5,6). Lake Ontario had a small flight of King Eider (1,2,5) and an array of lingering scoters, as expected mostly White-winged.

Red-tailed Hawk numbers were uniformly increased (1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9) with some areas reporting record Christmas Count tallies; conversely Rough-legged Hawk were quite scarce (1,2,5,6,9) with only Region 3 reporting normal or increased numbers. Ring-necked Pheasant continue to decline in upstate New York (1,5) and the Gray Partridge in the St. Lawrence Valley (6) are still in reduced numbers.

White-winged gulls staged a modest incursion (1,2,5,6,8) with best sites for numbers at the Robert Moses Power Dam on the St. Lawrence

River and at Oswego Harbor on Lake Ontario. The mild winter weather may explain the large numbers of wintering Ring-billed Gull (5,6,8,9); in some cases Ring-billed Gull numbers exceeded the usually more numerous Herring Gull. Little Gull are definitely being observed in greater numbers in the eastern Great Lakes (1,2)-? is this true in the Marine sector also?

Mourning Dove wintered in well above average numbers (1,3,4,5,-7,8,9), undoubtedly helped by the greater food supply made possible by the mild, snow-poor winter. Snowy Owl were reported in fair numbers in 1 but all other sectors indicated them as reduced or absent.

Red-bellied Woodpecker populations are increasing and/or expanding both upstate (1,2,3,4,5) and in the lower Hudson Valley (9); it will be interesting to see if, when common, this species becomes a "backyard" bird as it is in many areas of the South. Wintering Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (1,4,5,8,9) again attest to the mild winter or liberal bird feeders or both. Tufted Titmouse, like Cardinal and Mockingbird before it, has increased and expanded (1,2,3,4,5, even 7!) but the increase on the eastern Ontario Lakeplain has been quite slow. Red-breasted Nuthatch seemed extraordinarily scarce centrally (3,5,6) but the western (1) and eastern (8, 9) sectors seemed to have fair numbers. Carolina Wren, the most snow susceptible of the southern permanent residents, was reported in increased numbers (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8) but Region 9 reported reduced winter numbers; it will be of value to determine if the numerous wintering birds made it thru the heavy snow and protracted cold of late March. Golden-crowned Kinglet wintered in above average numbers (1,2,4,5,7,9) but no returning March flight of magnitude was noted. A statewide Northern Shrike irruption (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9) would have had even higher numbers if more gasoline for birding - we have to have the necessities, Mr. Simon - were available.

Cardinal numbers continue to increase (1,3,4,5,6,7) and some Christmas Counts now show impressive tallies; however, no expansion (8) and even decline (9) was noted in the eastern sectors-? beginning of a trend, local variability, non-concentration at feeders because of mild winter weather?

Winter finches were uniformly reported but in highly variable numbers - all sectors had Evening Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, and Common Redpoll in fair numbers but Red Crossbill and White-winged Crossbill were in very low and erratic numbers and extremely diverse periods of occurrence. Purple Finches were present in 1 but scarce or absent in all other sectors - this pattern of increased numbers of this species, and to a lesser extent with Snowy Owl and Red-breasted Nuthatch, suggests that western New York may be getting some spillover from a midwestern irruption of these species that central and eastern New York did not feel. Wintering Tree Sparrow seemed much reduced (1,5) in the Ontario

Lakeplain counties but southern and eastern sectors had excellent tallies.

Rarities for the season include Eared Grebe (1,3), White-fronted Goose (1), Harlequin Duck (1,5), Common Eider (2), Common Gallinule (8), Ivory Gull (1), Dovekie (2), Hawk Owl (5,6 — three birds in one winter probably constitutes an irruption for New York State), Black-backed Three-toed Woodpecker (4), Varied Thrush (6), Townsend's Solitaire (4), Bohemian Waxwing (6), Common Yellowthroat (7), Hoary Redpoll (1,2,7,8,9), European Goldfinch (1), and Dickcissel (7).

No report from Region 10 — what's happening in the Tidewater sector?

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REGION 1 — NIAGARA FRONTIER

VIVIAN MILLS PITZRICK

"A reasonable amount of fleas is good for a dog," said David Harum. Even so, some bad weather keeps feeder-watches happy. It was another fairly mild winter with a nearly normal December but of no major snowfall. Weather pattern for January and February was a repeat performance: very cold the first half with snow but delightfully spring-like with little ground cover the last and temperature reaching 55° Jan 27th and one degree less Feb 22nd. However, winter kept control with night temperatures dipping well below freezing nearly every night and Lake Erie finally reached 32° Feb 5th. Deceptively, March came in with a week of real spring — 60° the 7th — and lakes and ponds south of the snow belt¹ began to open. The Genesee River was mostly unfrozen all winter. The second week of March a succession of exceptionally cold nights slowed the warming trend and the winter, gathering momentum, finally roared out with a 2° below zero the 25th, ice storms in some areas the 29th and considerable snow accumulation by the 31st. (Data from Alfred Coop. Weather Station and WBEN — TV.) Many bird-feeders who had complained over "So few birds!" most of the winter, were saying during that last week of March, "We're going bankrupt!"

Perhaps because of increasing numbers of bird feeders as well as the relatively reasonable winter, "half-hardies", including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Carolina Wren, Mockingbird, American Robin, Hermit Thrush and Rusty Blackbird, were reported throughout the season. The Tufted Titmouse broke records by appearing on all eight Christmas Counts for the Region. Further, increased numbers and areas of occurrence of this species through the winter indicates an incursion year for our latitude and possibly a more successful breeding season here.

¹Snowfall at Buffalo in the "Snow Belt" was over 9 inches above normal this winter.

Of northern species, the Snowy Owl appeared in fair numbers but the finches were scarce until a few showed in February with many reports of White-winged Crossbills. During late February and through March, Common Redpolls were sighted in several areas. All winter, Evening Grosbeaks again returned to the Southern Tier areas in large numbers, but Pine Grosbeaks were very rare.

Whistling Swans held admiring observers spell-bound from the first appearance