

REGION 3 — FINGER LAKES

W. E. BENNING

The extreme cold of the fall season continued into December with the average temperature much below normal, especially the daytime readings. A brief respite in mid-month melted much of the snow cover, but, new snows almost daily along with constant sub-freezing temperatures until early February resulted in a heavy snow cover. The average temperature for January was 12.97 degrees F (-10.6° C) at Ithaca, the lowest ever recorded for the month. Frequent high winds, particularly on January 28th, added to the problem for both men and birds. February brought thaws and about average temperatures. The winter's precipitation expressed as inches of rainfall, not snowfall, was below normal.

The cold fall probably moved most of the half-hardies out. A few remained to be tallied on the Christmas counts but most of these disappeared with January's severe onslaught. A constant complaint was that few birds could be found in the field or even at the feeders after the January 28th blizzard.

But there were bright spots. It was a good year for N. Shrikes and Snow Buntings. Many Yellow-rumped Warblers stayed at least until January. December brought an Osprey, an Eastern Phoebe and a Nashville Warbler. Three western species, Lark Sparrow, Brewer's Blackbird and a possible Mountain Bluebird, all appeared in the Clifton Spring-Newark area.

Other than a fairly good number of Evening Grosbeaks, the northern finch flight was poor. There was a small, spotty influx of Purple Finches and a very few Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins but no Pine Grosbeaks or crossbills. Increased feeding of thistle seed brought in more American Goldfinches or, at least, made them more visible at feeders.

The warm days of late February brought 7,000 Canada Geese to MNWR with Snows the next day and many flocks of icterids. On Feb. 27th migrating geese were everywhere in the Region. Brubaker tallied 15,175 going north over the Seneca Lake Valley between 10 and 11:45 A.M.

Rarities: Osprey, Iceland Gull, Common Raven, Mountain Bluebird (unconfirmed), Nashville Warbler, Brewer's Blackbird, Lark Sparrow.

Abbreviations: Cay—Cayuga; CC—Christmas Count preceded by CC for Central Cayuga Jan. 1, E for Elmira Jan. 1, G for Geneva Dec. 18, I for Ithaca Jan. 1, M for Montezuma Jan. 1 (Region 3 portion only), WG for Watkins Glen Dec. 26; SP—State Park; Sen—Seneca; WFC—January Waterfowl Count but without returns from Seneca Lake; * (starred) details on file.

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LOONS—DUCKS: Com. Loon: 4 reports; max 5 Cay L Dec. 5. Red-necked Grebe: 1 MNWR Feb. 24 thru. Horned Grebe: 66 WFC low. Pied-billed Grebe: 31 WFC. Great Blue Heron: several in Dec. but few after Jan. 1. Whistling Swan: 3 Branchport early Jan. Canada Goose: 7113 WFC. Mallard: 2378 WFC; unusual raft of 5000 Cay L off Sheldrake Feb. 27. Black: 686 WFC. Gadwall: overwintered on Cay and Sen L; max 28 at s end of Sen L. Jan. 16. Pintail: 30 MNWR Feb. 26. Green-winged Teal: 1 Branchport early Dec.; 1 CCCC. Am. Wigeon: 19 Long Pt. SP Dec. 10; 10 CCCC; 4 WGCC. Wood Duck: 3 ICC. Redhead: 6939 WFC; 10 on Canandaigua Outlet near Clifton Springs in Feb. for the first time in several years. Ring-necked: 4 WGC; 3 Horseheads Feb. 24. Canvasback: 553 WFC. Greater Scaup: 325 GCC low. Lesser Scaup: 41 WFC low. Com. Goldeneye: 292 WFC. Bufflehead: 84 WFC. Oldsquaw: 8 GCC. White-winged Scoter: 4 Watkins Glen Jan. 30 (JB). Ruddy Duck:

4 Dresden thru Jan.; 2 CCCC; 6 GCC. Hooded Merganser: 35 WFC. Com. Merganser: 180 GCC; 150 MNWR Feb. 28. Red-breasted Merganser: 18 GCC; 10 WFC.

HAWKS—ALCIDS: Hawks: Goshawk: 1 GCC; 1 ICC; 1 report each in Jan. and Feb. Penn Yan. Sharp-shinned: 1 all winter picking off birds at feeder Clyde; 2 GCC; 3 ICC; 2 MCC; 1 Elmira Jan. 1. Cooper's: 10 specific reports spread over the Region plus "many reports at feeders—Odessa, Watkins Glen." Red-tailed: while still commonly seen, numbers probably were down; comment by MW, "No reports after extreme weather"; 1 seen taking a crow near Clifton Springs (JW). Red-shouldered: 1 ICC. Rough-legged: not a heavy flight year with most reports from Penn Yan-Watkins Glen-Elmira area; 8 WGCC. Marsh: with several birds overwintering in Seneca, Schuyler and Yates counties and singles reported from MNWR, Ithaca and Elmira; there may be reason for cautious optimism here. **OSPREY:** 1 Ithaca Dec. 5 (JG)* very late. Am. Kestrel: 35 GCC. Ruffed Grouse: increasing Penn Yan (ML); 4 each GCC and ICC. Ring-necked Pheasant: 31 MCC. Turkey: 8 ICC. Am. Coot: 883 WFC. Killdeer: 2 Phelps Dec. 18 and Jan. 8; 1 Camp Dittmer Feb. 27. Com. Snipe: 1 ICC. **ICELAND GULL:** 1 Sen L Feb. 11-13 (Betty Strath). Great Black-backed Gull: 14 ICC; 1 wintered at Watkins Glen, the first in several years. Herring and Ring-billed Gulls: 300 of each fed at Waterloo Dump.

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: 343 ECC; 302 MCC; numbers seemed to go down Jan.-Feb. Barred Owl: 1-2 Sapsucker Woods early Jan. Long-eared Owl: heard along 6 Mile Creek early Jan. (S. Sabo). Short-eared Owl: 2 at former roost near Hall; 5 each at Yerkes and Watts road roosts in Sen Co. Saw-whet Owl: 1 heard along 6 Mile Creek (S. Sabo). Belted Kingfisher: 4 ECC; 3 ICC; 2 GCC. Com. Flicker: 17 GCC. Pileated Woodpecker: 2 ICC; 1 GCC. Red-bellied Woodpecker: the spread of this species in recent years from its traditional stronghold in the Clyde River-Montezuma Marsh area is illustrated by the CCS; 16 MCC; 14 GCC; 10 ICC; 1 ECC. Red-headed Woodpecker: 1 Penn Yan; 1 Reeder's Creek Dec. 4-Feb. 13. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 1 Clifton Springs Dec. 4-23; 1 ICC; 1 Elmira Jan. 2. Hairy Woodpecker: regarded as scarce by some; max 56 ICC. Downy Woodpecker: possibly down; 115 ICC; 87 GCC; 71 MCC.

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: Eastern Phoebe: Probable immature Ithaca Dec. 19 (C. Felton) very late date. Horned Lark: normal to below; 283 GCC. **COM. RAVEN:** 3 Monterey Feb. (JB). Com. Crow: migrating MNWR Feb. 27. Black-capped Chickadee: 562 ICC. Tufted Titmouse: 40 ICC; 22 ECC; 9 GCC; 3 MCC. White-breasted Nuthatch: down. Red-breasted Nuthatch: scarce. Brown Creeper: best reports are from protected areas. Winter Wren 1 report ECC. Carolina Wren: good reports to Jan. 1, i.e., 11 ICC, few thereafter; 4 survived at Penn Yan and 2 at Interlaken Beach and 1 at Sheldrake in ravines. Mockingbird: 1 each Clyde, Clifton Springs, Reeder's Creek and 2 Ithaca. Gray Catbird: 1 wintered Burdett. Brown Thrasher: 2 at Ithaca feeders. Am. Robin: few wintering. Hermit Thrush: 1 Camp Dittmer Jan. 2; 1 Ithaca Feb. 1-7 no details; 1 Pine City Jan. 10. **MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD:** a good description of a bird at Newark Jan. 15 (BK) but, in the absence of a photograph or specimen, it remains unconfirmed. Golden-crowned Kinglet: 26 ICC; 17 MCC; 10 GCC; 1 at Penn Yan feeder thru Feb; 1 eating suet at Clifton Springs Jan. 7-16. N. Shrike: invasion year; widespread.

VIREOS—WARBLERS: **NASHVILLE:** 1 Elmira Dec. 15 (WH)*. Yellow-rumped: 48 GCC very high; 7 ICC; 3 WGCC with 1 thru Feb. 2; up to 12 Camp Dittmer thru Jan. 15.

WEAVERS—SPARROWS: E. Meadowlark: 50 Elmira Dec. 3; 9 ECC; otherwise scarce. Red-winged Blackbird, Com. Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird: few wintered; migrants Feb. 24 on. Rusty Blackbird: 5 MCC; 6 ECC. **BREWER'S BLACKBIRD:** 1 Clifton Springs late Dec.-Jan. 20 (M. Smith, JW)* good descriptions submitted by both. Cardinal: excellent numbers. Evening Grosbeak: moved into Ithaca late Dec. with 901 ICC; by mid-Jan. widely spread in small flocks. Purple Finch: good numbers Penn Yan, Clifton Springs fewer elsewhere. House Finch: 1 at Waterloo feeder, a new location. Common Redpoll: 45 CCCC; 8

ICC; 2 Big Flats; 1 report Penn Yan. Pine Siskin: 3 ICC; 1 ECC; 1 report Penn Yan. Am. Goldfinch: many everywhere. Rufous-sided Towhee: 3 ICC; 1 CCCC. **LARK SPARROW:** 1 Clifton Springs Dec. 3-12 (DW,JW)* photographed. Dark-eyed Junco: (Slate-colored) 259 ICC; 177 ECC; 120 GCC; (Oregon) 2 ECC. Tree Sparrow: one of the few birds readily found in the field during the period. Field Sparrow: 2 MCC; 2 ECC; 1 CCCC; 3 reports Penn Yan. White-crowned Sparrow: 3 ICC; 1 MCC; immature thru Feb. Penn Yan. White-throated Sparrow: 36 GCC; 28 ECC; 123 ICC; 1 MCC; a few at feeders thru Feb. Swamp Sparrow: 7 ICC; 6 WGCC; 1 GCC. Song Sparrow: 31 ICC; 26 MCC; 12 GCC; 12 ECC all very low; few at feeders. Lapland Longspur: 7 MCC; 6 ICC; 1 GCC; scattered individuals in Jan. Snow Bunting: 516 CCCC; 151 WGCC; 130 ECC; 65 GCC; 51 ICC; many large flocks reported including 200 Watkins Glen Feb. 21, 500 Elmira Jan. 21, 2000 near Yellow Tavern in Sen Co (P. Trail) and a mind boggling flock of 3000-5000 which stayed around Hall for several weeks (ML).

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REGION 4 – SUSQUEHANNA

MARY DOBINSKY for LESLIE BEMONT

By the first weekend in December, the pattern for our record cold winter had already been set. The first of many sub-zero nights occurred Dec. 2. After that it was just more of the same. Ice quickly sealed lakes and ponds. Late fall migrants evacuated the area without delay.

Even the swift-flowing Susquehanna River, which generally outruns attempts to top it with an ice cover, was about 95% frozen from early January until the ice started to break up the last weekend in February.

However, (and this was a high point of a dull season!!) the few open channels of the river evidently offered a haven to Redheads, seldom seen in this area. About 100 were reported wintering during February at various localities along the river. Higher numbers of goldeneye and scaup also were counted. Mallards and Common Mergansers wintered in normal numbers. Only Black Ducks seemed down.

Reports of Great Blue Herons, unusual here after late fall, persisted through early January in widespread areas of the region.

Low hawk counts could be attributed to the continuous snow cover which blanketed fields from mid-December until mid-February. The area escaped heavy snow storms but it snowed a little every couple of nights, and there was no thaw. Even the few American Kestrels which usually remain through the winter apparently took off for easier hunting.

Noteworthy sightings for the season included Horned Grebe, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

Also in defiance of the severe winter, many less hardy species tested their ability to survive, and apparently succeeded! Mockingbirds, robins, Carolina Wren and Tufted Titmouse were reported throughout.

Purple Finches were at feeders in record numbers, arriving in early January. Otherwise it was a poor year for wintering finches. There were only single reports for Pine Grosbeak, Redpoll, siskin and crossbills. Evening Grosbeak moved in later than usual but quickly built up numbers.