

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: 30 Franklin Feb. 24, "several" Port Crane Feb. 25, only reports. Blue Jay: 399 BCC No. 2, 394 OCC, 261 TCC. Common Crow: 274 BCC, 244 OCC, 149 TCC. Black-capped Chickadee: 213 BCC, 265 OCC, 157 TCC. Tufted Titmouse: 8 BCC, 15 TCC, daily Bing. reports thru period, 3 Owego observers made Jan. reports, 1 Franklin Feb. 22. White-breasted Nuthatch: 34 BCC; 33 OCC; 25 TCC. Red-breasted Nuthatch: 6 BCC, 4 OCC, 3 Oneonta Feb. 19. Brown Creeper: 8 BCC No. 2, 8 OCC, 3 TCC. **HOUSE WREN:** 1 Goodyear Lake Dec. 5 "observed several minutes around boat dock" (I&WW). Carolina Wren: 3 BCC, 1 OCC, reports from Bing., and Owego thru period. Mockingbird: 8 BCC, 1 OCC, reports thru period from Bing. Choconut Center, Oneonta, Otego, Delhi.

Am. Robin: 2 BCC, 3 OCC, 1 TCC, single reports throughout. Hermit Thrush: 1 BCC. Golden-crowned Kinglet: 9 BCC, 15 BCC No. 2, 17 OCC, 2 Bing. Feb. 13, only reports. **RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET:** 1 OCC. Cedar Waxwing: 18 BCC, 71 BCC No. 2, 1 OCC, 6 Bing. reports in Feb. Northern Shrike: 1 BCC, 1 Jan. 15 and Feb. 12 at Otego, 1 Burlington Flats "took small birds near Dowdall feeder" thru period, single birds also at Owego and Delhi. Starling: 4190 BCC, 362 OCC, 283 TCC.

VIREOS-WARBLERS: Yellow-rumped Warbler: 1 Vestal Dec. 9, 27, 31 (GC), 1 Vestal throughout, 2 on Feb. 11 (B&TW).

BLACKBIRDS-SPARROWS: E. Meadowlark: 20 Cooperstown Dec. 14 (MK), 1 BCC No. 2. Red-winged Blackbird: 1 BCC, 2 TCC, no others until first migrants Feb. 26. Northern Oriole: 1 Bing. Dec. 22. Common Grackle: 2 BCC No. 2, no others until Feb. 27. Brown-headed Cowbird: 17 OCC, 1 TCC, 28 Bing. Jan. 25, 30 Oneonta Feb. 28 highest count. Cardinal: 69 BCC, 123 BCC No. 2, 76 OCC, 82 TCC. **ROSE-BREASTED GROS-BEAK:** 1 female Delhi Dec. 6 (MC). Evening Grosbeak: 158 BCC, 507 BCC No. 2, 300 OCC, 317 TCC. Purple Finch: 6 BCC, 15 OCC, really moved in after Jan. 6—reports of up to 20 daily at feeders in Oneonta, Norwich, Delhi, Bing. House Finch: 52 BCC, 2 OCC. Pine Grosbeak: one report, Owego, January. Common Redpoll: 20 Delhi Jan. 26. Pine Siskin: 6 BCC No. 2, only report. American Goldfinch: 156 BCC, 167 BCC No. 2, 33 OCC, 116 TCC, good counts all period. White-winged Crossbill: 20 Bainbridge Dec. 25, only report. Rufous-sided Towhee: 1 Bing. until early January; 2 Oneonta thru period (E&FW). Savannah Sparrow: 1 TCC, also Owego, January. Dark-eyed Junco: 83 BCC, 70 OCC, 97 TCC, good counts thru. Tree Sparrow: 266 BCC, 108 OCC, 222 TCC. Field Sparrow: 1 BCC, 4 Oneonta Dec. 5. White-crowned Sparrow: 1 Bing. Dec. 4, 5, 11 (M&RS). White-throated Sparrow: 52 BCC No. 2, 12 OCC, 3 TCC, several feeder reports throughout. Song Sparrow: 14 BCC No. 2, 5 OCC, very few reports. Snow Bunting: 30 Oneonta Dec. 1, 33 BCC No. 2, 500 OCC, 275 TCC, 50 Norwich Jan. 18, 25 Meredith Feb. 11 and 26.

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REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

FRITZ SCHEIDER

Frigid, fierce, formidable, ferocious, foot-deep, frosty, and forever—thirty-one miles of ice from Derby Hill to Fair Haven—four hundred plus inches (10+ m) of snow in the Tug Hill Plateau—out-of-sight heating bills—the worst winter in two hundred years—and you can have it! After early December the ground snow just got deeper and deeper—no thaw, no melt, no compaction, no let-up. By mid-January the half-hardies were either snowed under or frozen out, the duck and gull numbers dropped precipitously, and we still had the longest

month of the year—February—to go. The intense cold (greatest known temperature decrease locally recorded for any winter), the fierce winds, and the rising ground snow drove out the residual raptors, the field birds that attempted to persist, and even reduced to scarcity that toughest of citizens, the Common Crow. All-day birding trips might yield only sixteen to eighteen species for the day; in the Adirondack sectors, even less.

Syracuse received 142 inches (361 cm) of that white manna of skiers and Pulaski and Oswego even more than that. The highways in and out of Syracuse were frequently closed by falling or drifting snow; many birders stated they had little to report because they could not get out and about. The poor birding conditions, the execrable weather, and the lack of any significant flights of more northern avifauna made the '76-'77 winter memorable—negatively. No wonder the first Red-winged Blackbirds in late February were greeted with the enthusiasm one normally reserves for Goshawks, Golden Eagles, and godwits. And with luck and a prolonged thaw, the Tug Hill Plateau might be rediscovered by late June or early July.

Positive trends: 1) increased numbers of accipiters, frequently at feeders; 2) more wintering Great Black-backed Gulls; 3) better numbers of wintering Mourning Doves, probably secondary to both changing farm practices and more feeders; 4) greater numbers of wintering Blue Jays; 5) good tallies on wintering Red-breasted Nuthatches; 6) an upsurge in Mockingbirds; 7) excellent numbers of wintering American Robins and Cedar Waxwings; 8) a fine irruption of Northern Shrikes; 9) an increase in Cardinals; 10) a strong but late movement of both Evening Grosbeaks and Purple Finches; and 11) the return of migrant hawks and Common Crows at Derby Hill in late February—there is hope.

Negative trends: 1) severe attrition in waterfowl numbers; 2) reduced counts of most species of wintering hawks and owls; 3) a miniscule flight of white-winged gulls; 4) a marked fall-off in the common wintering gulls, secondary to both severe icing and widespread dump closures; 5) a paucity of winter woodland residents—most woodpeckers, Black-capped Chickadees, and White-breasted Nuthatches; 6) a nearly complete loss of the local Carolina Wren population and a drop in Tufted Titmouse numbers; 7) nearly total loss of wintering half-hardies, particularly those dependent on seeps, springs, and running water; and 8) a winter finch flight marked by more non-observations than observations—they were mighty scarce this winter.

Rarer birds this winter: Brant, Barrow's Goldeneye, King Eider, Peregrine Falcon, Common Redpoll, and Harris' Sparrow.

Abbreviations: CC—Christmas Counts; DH—Derby Hill; L—Lake; Pt—Point.

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Observers: D. Ackley, G. Church, D. Crumb, B. and D. DeSimone, T. Dittrich, G. Huggins, L. Leidwinger, B. and S. Peebles, J. Propst, T. Riley, M. Rusk, F. Scheider, G. Smith, M. Stooks, and E. VanDresar.

LOONS—DUCKS: Red-necked Grebe: singles at Oneida (crash landed on a local street), Feb. 12-14 Oswego Harbor, and Oneida River Feb. 26-28. BRANT: a single bird attempted to winter Dec. 19 thru Jan. 8 at Oswego—it didn't make it. The winter attrition in waterfowl numbers was most impressive and this for virtually all species except the hardy Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, and Common Merganser—*sic*, Mallard 460 Jan. 15 Webster Pond at Syracuse, then down to 200 in February there; Black Duck: 80 Jan. 15, 50 Jan. 20, then less than 20 in Feb., all Webster Pond; Gadwall: 33 Jan. 8 Oswego Harbor, down to two Feb. 12 same place. A single Pintail at Caughdenoy and a male Wood Duck at Oswego round out the surviving dabbling ducks. Redhead: best numbers in a decade—1024 on Skaneateles L Jan. 15 (M. Rusk, T. Riley) and 400 thru Feb. at Caughdenoy, Oneida River, the latter perhaps birds frozen out of Skaneateles L which was icebound in Feb. Greater Scaup: 1500 in early Jan. down to 550 by Feb. 12, 350 by Feb. 27, all at Oswego; hundreds of dead

birds picked up by C. G. Spies showed severe emaciation and/or gull-attack damage. Common Goldeneye: good numbers despite the horrendous winter—550 Jan. 8 Oswego to Nine Mile Pt., 210+ Oswego Feb. 26. **BARROW'S GOLDENEYE**: a single male at Oswego Jan. 8-Feb. 5 and an elusive but different male at Phoenix Jan. 23-Feb. 5. **KING EIDER**: five individuals Dec. 19 at Oswego; down to one immature male there Jan. 16, none thereafter. White-winged Scoter: 52 Jan. 8 Oswego to Nine Mile Pt., down to 12 Feb. 5, to one Feb. 21, both counts at Oswego. Common Merganser: early poor numbers (740 Jan. 8 Oswego) rose to 1025 Feb. 21 Oswego Harbor, one of the few ducks that increased at all this winter.

HAWKS—ALCIDS: Sharp-shinned Hawk: increased number for this season (normally an uncommon to rare bird in winter)—13 for the winter with almost half noted plugging feeders. Cooper's Hawk: 11 individuals, widely scattered, again like the Sharp-shinned noted harrassing feeding station birds. Red-tailed Hawk: numbers low for the winter, probably secondary to deep snow covering rodents—max 14 Feb. 2 Clay area; first notable DH flight 160 Feb. 27. Red-shouldered Hawk: only report is one Jan. 2 Oneida CC, none otherwise, and none in the late Feb. raptor movement on Feb. 27 DH. Rough-legged Hawk: winter max five (four light morph, one dark morph) Dec. 5 Pulaski area; restricted numbers (one-three/day) thru Jan. and Feb. until first flight DH (31 birds) Feb. 27; first migrant Rough-legged Hawk is one dark morph Feb. 12 DH—what an optimist! Marsh Hawk: last noted one Dec. 18 Clay Swamp—unreported until return flight in late Feb. with 23 Feb. 27 DH, and two Feb. 28 Eaton. American Kestrel: low numbers thru winter (two-five/day), particularly low in early Feb.; like the accipiters, many reported frequenting feeding station sites. A single **PEREGRINE FALCON** Dec. 11 near Eaton (G. Church) is the only rare raptor for the winter. American Coot: max 22 Dec. 19 Oswego; down to 12 by late Feb., with most of the losses as fodder for the omnivorous Great Black-backed Gulls there. Shorebirds attempting to winter—max six Killdeer and three Common Snipe Dec. 26 Skaneateles CC—present into early Jan. but none reported after late Jan. White-winged gulls—a miserable flight, incredibly poor considering the severity of the winter—three Glaucous Feb. 12 and three Iceland Jan. 8, all at Oswego are the winter high counts; the lack of open water and the covered and/or discontinued dumps probably explain the poor numbers although it may have been a scant flight anyway. Great Black-backed Gull: 300 Jan. 8-16 Oswego Harbor—apparently most surviving on a combination of available fish and dying waterfowl as almost no dump usage was noted for this species this winter. Herring Gull: a profound fall-off thru the winter—1721 Dec. 19, 1200 Jan. 8, 1000 Jan. 16, 500 Feb. 3, 450 Feb. 21, 35 Feb. 27; the Ring-billed Gull showed even sharper decline—3300 Jan. 8, 3000 Jan. 16, 50 Feb. 3, 15 Feb. 12, all figures from Oswego Harbor, the only available open water.

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: 476 on B Burtt Dec. Feeder Survey, the highest Dec. tally ever; numbers persisted thru Jan. but some drop in Feb. with the severe cold and deep snow; the increased wintering numbers are probably a function of increased food supply secondary to corn-farming coupled with inadequate harvesting of same this past fall; field counts six-45/day; courtship activity noted in mid-Feb. (either immensely hopeful or incredibly sexy). Snowy Owl: five individuals for winter—Syracuse Airport (two), Deansboro, Clay, and Sherrill; oddly none reported from Ontario Lakeplain sites. Uncommon owls are a Barred Owl Dec. 19 near Fulton, a Short-eared Owl also Dec. 19 near Hannibal, and Saw-whet Owl Jan. 24-27 Wampsville (B. and S. Peebles). Common Flicker: fair numbers in Dec.—4-7/day—but only singles noted in Feb. Red-headed Woodpecker: one persisting Feb. 10-20 Lairdsville (M. Stooks). Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers: very scarce thru the winter—max 17 Hairy and 31 Downy Dec. 26 Skaneateles CC; all woodpeckers very scarce in the Adirondack sector with five Hairy and no Downy there Feb. 13.

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: Blue Jay: an excellent wintering population—40-80/day in the field and a whopping 663 on B. Burtt's Feb. Feeder Survey, the highest tally ever. Common Crow: steady decline thru Jan. and early Feb. to frank scarcity (6-10/day) in mid-

Feb.; a huge upsurge in late Feb. with 995 Feb. 26 and 7000 Feb. 27 both counts at DH. Tufted Titmouse: a bit scarce this winter—max four Oneida CC Jan. 2. White-breasted Nuthatch: frankly scarce thru winter—counts of 16-32/day in Dec. but a sharp fall in numbers thru Jan. extending into Feb.—tallies only 1-11/day. Red-breasted Nuthatch: winter numbers up and widely so, just the reverse of the White-breasted Nuthatch—70 Dec. 5 and 22 Dec. 16 at Fabius, 26 Dec. 11 Big Moose, and 70 Feb. 13 Old Forge. Carolina Wren: a weather-induced crash—from 25 birds in Dec. to two in early Feb.; I have no idea how many, if any, will make it thru to spring—if spring makes it thru to here. Winter Wren: singles in Dec. but none in Jan. or Feb.—the rough weather literally wiped them out. Mockingbird: 14 birds noted thru winter, the majority surviving well in multiflora rose or privet hedges in the protected valleys east and west of Syracuse. American Robin: large numbers wintered in protected wooded and Buckthorn scrub areas south of Syracuse with the max 220 Jan. 20 S Onondaga, rather surprising in view of the severity of the winter. Hermit Thrush: six individuals reported thru Christmas Count period; none known to survive thru Feb. Cedar Waxwing: large tallies but scattered—120 Rice Creek Jan. 8, 100 Jan. 13 Fayetteville, 180 Feb. 6 Split Rock near Camillus—like the robins, feeding primarily on the enormous local crop of Buckthorn. Northern Shrike: a heavy irruption—17 on Oneida CC, reported widely thereafter with 20-25 individuals/month noted; extensively reported molesting small birds, particularly House Sparrows, at feeders, rather like the Willie Sutton approach to bank robbery.

VIREOS—WARBLERS: Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler: five Dec. 19 Oswego CC; checked for thereafter but none detected.

WEAVERS—SPARROWS: Virtually all the common black icterids noted in December but only a few Brown-headed Cowbirds and a few feeder-fixated Red-winged Blackbirds survived into Feb.; first major wave of Red-winged Blackbirds Feb. 26-28 with "thousands" Feb. 27 at the Seneca River flats. Cardinal: numbers increasing, e.g., B. Burt's Jan. Feeder Survey the best tally ever (379), probably a combination of real increase and feeder concentration because of deep snow and cold. Evening Grosbeak: small flocks (10-62/day) thru Dec. and early Jan.; however, a marked incursion in late Jan. and early Feb. with 1729 on B. Burt's Feb. Feeder Survey—feeder counts went from 10-12/day to 75/day in some areas near Utica. Purple Finch: rather scarce in Dec. but a heavy Jan. and Feb. incursion with 301 on Jan. and 724 on Feb. B. Burt's Feeder Survey; field counts, however, much, much lower—only 10-15/day. Pine Grosbeak: flocks of six to 35/day in northern Oneida and central Herkimer Co.; smaller groups as far afield as Fair Haven (nine), Phoenix (eight), and Waterville (eight); certainly not a heavy influx this winter. **COMMON REDPOLL:** very, very scarce—max five near Pompey Jan. 16 (L. Liedwinger); reported on only one of seven Christmas Counts. Pine Siskin: like redpoll, very scarce—1-5/day—and only from Adirondack and sub-Adirondack areas. American Goldfinch: large numbers (20-40/day) at feeders thru winter; peculiarly attracted to Niger Thistle feeders; field feeding by this species non-existent as virtually all weed seeds remained snow-buried. The only Red and White-winged Crossbills were from the Adirondacks—four Reds Jan. 8 and 22, two White-winged Jan. 8 and 22, all from Big Moose area—not a heavy flight, for sure. Dark-eyed Junco: plentiful in Dec. (16-24/day) but a sharp drop in Jan. with the deep snow; only 1-5/day at feeders thru Feb. Tree Sparrow: scarce thru winter—counts of 100+ only from various Christmas Counts, scarce thru Jan. and even more scarce in Feb. **HARRIS' SPARROW:** an immature male singing Feb. 2-24 at Camillus (R. Roberts), the third local record. White-crowned Sparrow: three singles at feeders, at least two survived the winter. White-throated Sparrow: high numbers (100) in Dec. at feeders, a modest fall in Jan., and then an upsurge (173) in Feb. as birds congregated at feeders to survive. Profound attrition noted in wintering Song and Swamp Sparrows, *sic*—Swamp 20 in Dec., one in Jan., one in Feb.; Song 89 in Dec., 22 in Jan., one in Feb. Snow Bunting: counts of 140-600/day Dec. thru Feb.; some return (flocks of 60-100) noted along L Ontario in the last week of Feb.

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