

REGION 4 – SUSQUEHANNA

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December remained mildly wintery, with the ground practically bare, until December 24 when 13 inches of damp, dense snow fell within just a few hours. That proved to be the heaviest single snowfall of the winter by far, even though precipitation during January totalled the highest on record for that month. January, after the first week, seemed to be one long January thaw with much of the precipitation in the form of rain. But in actuality temperatures were below freezing frequently, and enough of the precipitation was snow to maintain a constant, if sloppy, snow cover. Our real winter was concentrated in the second and third weeks of February when temperatures were seldom much above zero and frequently considerably below.

The one obvious bird activity-weather correlation was the movement of Canada Geese a day or so after the heavy Christmas Eve snowfall, presumably because their "grazing" areas had been covered. It seems likely that the spate of stranded grebes in the third week of February were simply north bound birds and were a small sample of a large movement. But they may have been retreating from shrunken open water areas to the north that resulted from the persistent intense cold.

There was a big increase in the number of feeder operators asking where all the birds were and tendency to believe that this meant that it was a bad year for all birds. Actually, on the Binghamton Christmas Count the number of species found was just about the average for the 27 years the count has been run and the number of individuals, dominated, of course, by Starlings, House Sparrows and, this year, Evening Grosbeaks, was the second highest ever, after last year. The discrepancy is apparently because, following several especially good years for variety, simply average is disappointing. But it is also true that the variety of winter finches, where many feeder expectations center, was actually down. There were no redpolls, essentially no siskins and Evening Grosbeaks, although very numerous, seem to become less and less dependent on feeders as the years go by. Non-feeder-frequenting winter finches were also scarce: few Pine Grosbeaks and no crossbills at all.

Icterids were almost entirely absent, after several years of good numbers, but there was one oriole. A group of nine flickers, all in one small area, also seems noteworthy.

On the plus side, titmice, Carolina Wrens and Mockingbirds are still with us, in spite of the past few harsh winters. The wren population may be somewhat precarious, which is in itself quite normal, but titmouse and Mockingbird populations seem quite healthy.

The rarities include a Varied Thrush, although they are coming close to being an annual event. The top rarity of the season was the Harlequin Duck that spent a month at Chenango Forks in very questionable company. This was the first record of the species in the Region in the 26 years records have been kept.

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Abbreviations: Bing-Binghamton; BCC-Bing. Christmas Count, Dec. 31, 33 observers; CCC-Cortland Christmas Count Dec. 23, partial; DOCC-Delaware Otsego Christmas Count, Dec. 16, 12 observers; GCC-Greene Christmas Count, Jan. 1, 2 observers (W, DB); WFC-Waterfowl Census.

LOONS-DUCKS: Common Loon: Dec. 2, Candor; two Otsego Lake Dec. 15. Horned Grebe: one Cortland Feb. 19 and one Bing, Feb. 21, both stranded and transported to water. Red-necked Grebe: one Bing, Feb. 17, one Maine Feb. 20 and one Oneonta at about the same time—all stranded and transported to water. Great Blue Heron: one BCC; one Che-nango Bridge Dec. 2 and 3; Dec. 30 Owego; one Willseyville Jan. 7. Canada Goose: three DOCC; about 150 Norwich Dec. 25, flying south; about 100 Endwell and 200 Cortland Dec. 26; also two reports from Owego in late Dec. Mallard: 160 CCC; 168 BCC; 104 WFC. Black Duck: ten CCC; 62 BCC; 3 WFC. Redhead: ten CCC; Feb. 19 Chenango Forks; no others. Scaup (sp?): two CCC; one female Otsego Lake Jan. 6 WFC. Common Goldeneye: 18 CCC; only eight on WFC. Bufflehead: one Chenango Forks Feb. 22. HARLEQUIN DUCK: one first-winter male at Chenango Forks with a flock of assorted hybrid barnyard ducks and some possibly wild Mallards—finally identified Feb. 19 (A, MD) although present from about Jan. 20—seen by many other observers and still present at the end of Feb. Common Merganser: two DOCC; three CCC; nine BCC; 86 WFC.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: one between Chenango Forks and Greene Dec. 24 (EH, SD), unusually late. Goshawk: one GCC; Jan. 20 Choconut Center (MS); two sightings of adults Feb. 4 in Oxford-Bowman Lake area, possibly the same bird (JL). Sharp-shinned Hawk: one DOCC; two BCC; seven other reports. Cooper's Hawk: one DOCC; two BCC; one GCC; one frequently at Vestal in Dec. and Feb.; also reported from Owego, Cortland and Homer. Red-tailed Hawk: nine DOCC; three BCC; one GCC; five from Vestal to Greene Dec. 24; also the usual fairly frequent, but scattered, winter reports. Rough-legged Hawk: four DOCC; three GCC; other reports from Owego, Sherburne, Oneonta and Milford. Bald Eagle: one adult Hancock Jan. 13 (BH); two Cannonsville Reservoir Jan. 24 (EH, SD, EW). Marsh Hawk: one BCC; one Truxton Jan. 5; no others. Am. Kestrel: nine DOCC; ten BCC; two GCC; relatively scarce after the first week of Jan. Ruffed Grouse: 11 CCC; five BCC; two GCC; frequency of reports still up compared to the last few years. Ring-necked Pheasant: missed on all three available complete Christmas Counts, for the first time in 27 years on the BCC; regular at one Vestal site after Jan. 7; also scattered reports from Choco-nut Center, Vestal Center, Owego and Candor. Turkey: two GCC, 27 in the same area two days earlier; 18 Owego Jan. 18; four at Otselic around manure piles Feb. 3; 20 Hinman's Corners, n. of Bing., Feb. 5. Herring Gull: one DOCC; 13 CCC; 11 BCC; 15 Owego Dec. 16; other scattered reports, as usual.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Rock Dove: 65 DOCC; 573 BCC. Mourning Dove: 35 DOCC; 146 BCC; five GCC. Screech Owl: one BCC; no others. Great Horned Owl: three

DOCC; one CCC; 21 BCC; two GCC. Snowy Owl: one Oceanum, e. of Bing., Jan. 15 (JR), the only one reported. Barred Owl: one DOCC; one BCC; two GCC; two Chenango Bridge Dec. 3; one Oneonta Dec. 10; one Westford, in Otsego Co., Dec. 15; two Vestal Jan. 6. Short-eared Owl: one n. of Johnson City Dec. 18. Saw-whet Owl: one GCC. Belted Kingfisher: two DOCC; eight BCC; none after Jan. 6, except in Tioga Co. Common Flicker: nine BCC all in one small area; one Endwell Dec. 2 (JK); Jan. 22 Owego (P, DM). Pileated Woodpecker: one DOCC; one CCC; two BCC; one GCC; two other reports. Red-headed Woodpecker: one Feb. report Owego. Red-bellied Woodpecker: one at Solon, e. of Cortland, Jan. 10. Hairy Woodpecker: 17 DOCC; 20 BCC; two GCC. Downy Woodpecker: 16 DOCC; 59 BCC; six GCC.

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: Horned Lark: Feb. 19 Owego, the only report. Blue Jay: 262 DOCC; 380 BCC; 40 GCC. Common Crow: 193 DOCC; 623 BCC; 273 GCC. Black-capped Chickadee: 269 DOCC; 476 BCC; 30 GCC. Tufted Titmouse: 15 BCC, only a third of the record high of last year but regular to intermittent reports from Chenango Forks, Chenango Bridge, Vestal, Apalachin and up to three Tioga Co. sites suggest numbers are not really down much; also reported from Vestal Center, Unadilla, McGraw and Homer. White-breasted Nuthatch: 29 DOCC; 53 BCC; two GCC. Red-breasted Nuthatch: one DOCC; two CCC; six BCC; three GCC; also at Owego, Sherburne and Candor. Brown Creeper: two DOCC; four BCC. Carolina Wren: three BCC; two at a feeder in e. Vestal all of Jan. and Feb. Mockingbird: seven BCC; one Freetown, Cortland Co., Dec. 26; reported from two different Tioga Co. sites in Jan.; also at Unadilla. **VARIED THRUSH:** one Greene Jan. 24 (W, DB), stayed only the one day, preventing other observers from seeing it—photos were disappointing, but one does show the prominent eye stripe. Am. Robin: one DOCC; 17 BCC; ten Choconut Center Dec. 23 and one daily at Candor until the end of Dec., then no more until Feb. 22 Chenango Forks. Golden-crowned Kinglet: 13 BCC; 20 GCC. Ruby-crowned Kinglet: Dec. 4 Chenango Forks. Cedar Waxwing: 13 DOCC; six CCC; 109 BCC; one GCC; scattered reports all season, 50 Apalachin Jan. 22, the best count. Northern Shrike: two DOCC; one GCC; eight other reports from Sherburne, Norwich, Oxford, Owego, Whitney Point, Choconut Center, Westford and Cortland. Starling: 534 DOCC; 3864 BCC; 53 GCC.

VIREOS—WARBLERS: none

WEAVERS—SPARROWS: House Sparrow: 387 DOCC; 882 BCC; 100 GCC. Eastern Meadowlark: Jan. 9 Owego, the only winter report. Red-winged Blackbird: two DOCC; none later until Feb. 26 Bing. **NORTHERN ORIOLE:** one Bing. Jan. 23 (AL), good look at about a four foot distance—around feeder but grape arbor with a few dried grapes on it nearby—went to a spot on the ground where a drier vent had melted off snow; presumably the same bird seen a few blocks away Jan. 27 (A, HC). Common Grackle: 12 CCC; one GCC; two Unadilla Dec. 17. Brown-headed Cowbird: one BCC; two Cortland Jan. 3, last date in the period. Cardinal: 21 DOCC; seven CCC; 163 BCC; five GCC. Evening Grosbeak: 427 DOCC; 20 CCC; 1034 BCC, the most ever; 75 GCC; particularly numerous from the second week of Jan. on. Purple Finch: 43 DOCC; 48 BCC; 11 GCC; numbers increased steadily as the winter wore on and seemed to be everywhere during the last three weeks of Feb. House Finch: 14 DOCC; 556 BCC; three GCC; also reported from Owego and Norwich; at Norwich singing and flock dispersal started during the second and third week of Feb. Pine Grosbeak: two BCC; at Stamford, in e. Delaware Co., Jan. 31 and thru Feb.; five Choconut Center Feb. 4; also reported in the Tyner area of Chenango Co. in Jan. Pine Siskin: ten BCC; one Unadilla Jan. 23; Owego Feb; that's all. Am. Goldfinch: 49 DOCC; 131 BCC; 23 GCC; a few almost everywhere but down from previous years. Dark-eyed Junco: 14 DOCC; 228 BCC; 15 GCC. Oregon Junco: one DeRuyter, Madison Co., Jan. 4; one Lockwood at the extreme west of Tioga Co., Jan. 15. Tree Sparrow: 25 DOCC; 431 BCC; 67 GCC. Field Sparrow: one Homer Dec. 23 (JAG); Jan. 11 thru 31 at Apalachin (P, EG); one Sherburne Nature Center feeder (R, SW). White-crowned Sparrow: one Chenango Bridge Dec. 4. White-throated Sparrow: two DOCC; 51 BCC; regular visitors at at least

three Triple Cities and two Owego feeders all winter. Song Sparrow: two DOCC; 41 BCC; heard singing at Unadilla Feb. 21. Snow Bunting: one flock of about 200 in Chenango Co. in Dec.; 75 in Gilbert Lake area, n. of Oneonta, Feb. 3; the only reports.

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REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

GENE HUGGINS

Winter season in central New York was characterized by less snow by the end of the period than the previous two seasons, 93.4 inches compared to 150 inches in 1978 and 145.3 inches in 1977. However, record sub-zero temperatures from Feb. 10-18 erased any thoughts that we had a mild winter. The snow that accumulated remained on the ground with very little subsequent thawing, and what little open water remained became quickly frozen over by the end of the period.

The consensus, among those who went afield, was that birds were very few. Red-necked Grebes were forced down in different parts of Oneida Co. during February as a result of inclement weather. A great attrition in surface-feeding and diving ducks occurred. Common Mergansers continued to decline as a wintering bird for reasons not fully understood.

Raptors, especially Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, declined in numbers toward the end of the period with the snow staying on the ground and prey becoming harder to obtain. Ruffed Grouse apparently are beginning to show an increase in numbers along the Lake Ontario plain as testified by one observer. Hopefully more observations will continue to verify this. Unfortunately Ring-necked Pheasants are doing the opposite, becoming nonexistent in rural areas. Not only the below freezing temperatures, but the closing of open dumps have hastened the decline in gulls along the Lake Ontario littoral with the exception of the Great Black-backed Gull.

Then came the Great Gray Owls in Oswego to lift the despondent bird-watcher's waning hopes—undoubtedly the first modern regional record for these spectacular birds.

Horned Larks continue to show a decline in the region, possibly a reflection of changing agricultural practices. Am. Robins were found in well-protected places that offered sufficient food throughout the Region, notably in Oswego Co. where they can be hard to find in the winter. Icterids were in the Region at the beginning of the season and then seemed to vanish with the start of the new year. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak made a very late appearance in Chittenango and lingered until Dec. 18th. Winter finches were very scarce, except for the ever-expanding population of House Finches, Evening Grosbeaks and Am. Goldfinches. Swamp and Song Sparrows which are normally present in favored locations during the winter were very hard to find at these same sites toward the end of February. In summation, bird populations were very thin.