

REGION 8 – HUDSON-MOHAWK

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The Hudson-Mohawk Region had all the makings of a "mini-Minnesota" with the sub-zero temperatures, howling winds, brutal wind chill factors, and best of all, Great Gray Owls. The weather started out relatively mildly this season. It was not until Christmas Day when the weather caught up to the season, when up to 18 inches of snow fell in the area. Shortly after, the snow gave way to an early January thaw. Alternating rain and freezing rain dominated the January theme, with most of the inclement weather coming on weekends making it venturesome to step outdoors. Most stations had 100% to 200% above normal precipitation in January. February was devastating with very low temperatures and blustery winds, which, when combined produced brutal wind-chill factors.

Of course, the birding news of the season was the totally unprecedented invasion of Great Gray Owls. News of Great Grays was received from neighboring areas in early January but it was not until Ken Able found an individual in East Berne in the Helderbergs on January 23 that things got rolling here. By mid-February, reports of new or suspected Great Gray Owls were coming into the Dial-a-Bird tape almost daily. Many of the reports turned out to be Barred Owls, while others were convincingly described or verified by experienced birders as Great Grays. Typically, the Great Grays were spotted in an area for only a day or two. A few seemed to reappear in a week or so, while others were never seen again. It is suspected that the owls were more or less stationary, but because of the extensive wooded tracts surrounding them, they disappeared into the woods and escaped observation. Owls in more restricted locations were observed more readily and gave the impression of staying around longer.

Other birding highlights of the season were neighbors of the Great Gray Owls back home. These included the Region's first and second records of Boreal Owl and Gray Jay, Bohemian Waxwing and Pine Grosbeak. One of the Boreal Owls was unfortunately found dead and frozen under a fir tree Feb. 5. The bird was terribly emaciated (weighing only 88.7 grams). This appears to be the State's thirteenth specimen, and now is at the New York State Museum at Albany.

Reports were received with thanks from: Bill Able, Ken Able, Doug Ayres, Arlene & Tom Brown, Steve Browne, Bob Budliger, Burrell Buffington, Jim Bush, Geoffrey Carleton, Lee Chamberlaine, Juanita Cook, Kate Dunham, Barbara & Hugh Gardina, Elizabeth Grace, Richard P. Guthrie, Ron & Carolyn LaForce, E. Mansell, Elsie Powell, Ed Reilly, Walt Sabin, Debbie Shaw, Janet Silvernail and Lester Thomas. Special thanks go to Bob Yunick for gathering and compiling the myriad of Dial-a-Bird records and Great Gray and Boreal Owl data.

LOONS-DUCKS: Great Blue Heron: one Schenectady Christmas Count Dec. 16; one Ft. Plain count week; one thru late Jan., W. Sand Lake. Canada Goose: 666 Chatham CC Dec. 16; 147 is the total of three other counts. Mallard: 439 Chat CC; 386 Troy CC Dec. 30; both counts high. Black Duck: 345 Chat CC; total of four other counts 215; also high. Gadwall: one Troy CC. Pintail: one Troy CC. Wood Duck: one Catskill-Coxsackie CC Dec. 27. Hooded Merganser: 75 Saratoga Lk. Dec. 20; 20 Cohoes Falls Jan. 14; very high numbers and late dates.

HAWKS—ALCIDS: Goshawk: 12 reports thru period incl. five from CC's. Sharp-shinned Hawk: 18 reports incl. eight from three CC's and feeder raiders at six locations thru Jan. Cooper's Hawk: eight reports incl. four from CC's and one each from feeders at Eagle Mills, mid-Dec. and Glenville, Jan. 13. Red-tailed Hawk: total of six CC's 179—down from 324 last year. Red-shouldered Hawk: one each on four CC's plus two other reports. Rough-legged Hawk: 31 total of CC's, max 13 Cats-Cox CC (low). **BALD EAGLE:** one imm Cats-Cox CC (BB). Marsh Hawk: only two reports. Merlin: two Chat CC (one observed taking a House Sparrow at a feeder [ER]). Am. Kestrel: 88 from five CC's, Ft. Plain had none. Ruffed Grouse: 33 from six CC's compared to 32 from four CC's last year. Bobwhite: 27 from Chat CC—where'd they come from? Ring-necked Pheasant: nine from four CC's. Turkey: 19 Chat CC; also Tom Res and several hill town reports of 10 to 15. Killdeer: one Chat CC. Am. Woodcock: one in Schen count circle during count period. Common Snipe: two Troy CC. Iceland Gull: one each Schen and Troy counts. Great Black-backed Gull: numerous until the ice caught up to them—80 combined total of five counts, max 42 Troy CC. Herring Gull: 303 from five counts; max 171 Cats-Cox. Ring-billed Gull: 623 total of five counts, max 448 from Schen.

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: continues in good numbers—1692 total of six CC's. Screech Owl: ten reports inc. three taking mice offered to them from a porch in New Balt., late Feb. Great Horned Owl: 29 reports inc. 13 from five CC's—very high, usually 5 to 10 reports. Snowy Owl: seven reports Dec. 1 thru Feb. 18, most individuals were seen one day only. Barred Owl: another impressive tally, 17 from many localities all from mid-Jan. thru late Feb., curiously coincidental with the following species dates. **GREAT GRAY OWL:** 15 records between Jan. 23 and Feb. 28 (plus two in March). Extensive television coverage led to numerous other reports which were either not confirmed or proved to be Barred Owls. One Great Gray was shot and turned over to a vet where at last word it is reportedly doing well and will be released when recovered. Another Great Gray was found dead of unknown causes (not shot) near W. Sand Lake. Still another was reported to have been shot in Rensselaer, but confirmation is lacking. One Great Gray was captured and banded in Colonie on Feb. 25 (RPG). Short-eared Owl: showed up as usual in time for the Cats-Cox CC where two remained thru Feb. 18; one was banded Dec. 27 at Coxsackie Flats (RPG). **BOREAL OWL:** first Regional record—one photographed in a fir tree in a Saratoga Springs yard; another was found dead in a yard in Glenville, Schen Co. on Feb. 5. Saw-whet Owl: one caught on a porch in Charlton Jan. 26. Belted Kingfisher: well represented on five of the six area counts; curiously absent from Chatham count. Com. Flicker: 38 on five CC's; other reports thru Feb. incl. one in Berne. Red-bellied Woodpecker: one Ft. Plain CC Dec. 29. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: one Schen CC and one at Central Bridge feeder thru Jan. 24. Hairy Woodpecker: 112 on six CC's, down from 181 last year. Downy Woodpecker: 309 from counts vs. 356 last year.

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: **GRAY JAY:** one at Niskayuna feeder Dec. 20 (*vide* RPY). Blue Jay: well down from last year; 863 total of six CC's vs 1810 last year. Tufted Titmouse; slight increase in numbers from last year; however is continuing an apparent range expansion into the Adirondack low hills at Jenny Lake, Saratoga County. Three were banded there on Dec. 23; one remained thru Feb. (RPY). White-breasted Nuthatch: sharp decrease from last year, 258 from six CC's compared to 334 last year, and 340 five years ago. Red-breasted Nuthatch: present thru period but not in any great numbers; only 18 reported from five CC's. Winter Wren: no reports. Carolina Wren: one each So. Rens CC and Schen count period. Mockingbird: 115 up from 89 on last year's CC's and 48 five years ago; Ft. Plain again reported one. Gray Catbird: one So. Rens. CC and one mid-Feb. Chatham (KD & EG). Brown Thrasher: one Jan. 11 Altamont feeder. Am. Robin: an amazing 508 from Schen CC and 171 Cats-Cox CC; 148 total of three other CC's; none on Ft. Plain CC. Hermit Thrush: one Schen CC; also one late Feb. Niskayuna. Eastern Bluebird: 12 Chatham CC, up from 7 last year and none five years ago; six Craryville Feb. 5 (BB). **BOHEMIAN WAXWING:** five Dec. 26 thru 31 Cambridge, Washington Co (WS); also one

Catskill Feb. 25 (JB). Cedar Waxwing: a busy year for these, with reports from many places; numbers tapering off toward end of period. Northern Shrike: 23 reports incl. 12 from five CC's.

VIREOS—WARBLERS: Yellow-rumped Warbler: 10 Cox-Athens CC (RB).

WEAVERS—SPARROWS: Eastern Meadowlark: scarce as usual, reported on two CC's. Red-winged Blackbird: surprisingly absent—only one each on three CC's and scant other reports. Northern Oriole: one at Glenville feeder Dec. 23 thru Jan. 23. Rusty Blackbird: two Schen CC. Com. Grackle: numerous in contrast to the Red-winged Blackbird, somewhat the reverse of the usual trend. Cardinal: 480 total of six CC's down from 506 five years ago and 518 last year. Perhaps because of the rather mild winter leading up to the counts, folks weren't feeding birds yet, leading to the lower tally of this and some other species. Evening Grosbeak: considered not a significant flight year by many observers, but an impressive 2848 were counted on the six area CC's. Pine Grosbeak: scattered reports, mostly from the hill towns late Dec. thru Feb. 20. Common Redpoll: only reports were from Col. Co. in early Feb. Rufous-sided Towhee: Chatham Dec. 16 and Jan. 7. Savannah Sparrow: only three reported by two CC's. Dark-eyed Junco: 587 reported on six CC's incl one "Oregon" Junco (EG & KD). Tree Sparrow: numerous comments about scarcity in late Dec. and early Jan. Field Sparrow: four from area CC's incl. one that returned to the Gorman feeder for the Troy count for the fifth consecutive year. White-crowned Sparrow: one each Chatham and Troy CC's; also one Feb. 20 Schoharie. White-throated Sparrow: 375 total of six CC's. Fox Sparrow: feeder reports from Troy (one) and W. Sand Lake (two) mid-Jan. to mid-Feb. Swamp Sparrow: four on CC's plus one Feb. 20 at Schoharie. Song Sparrow: 129 total of six CC's; compare with White-throated. Lapland Longspur: only one each from two CC's. Snow Bunting: 69 Troy CC; flock of 800-1000 Cossackie mid- Feb.

Visitors are reminded that they may receive or deliver messages of the latest birding news in the Hudson-Mohawk region by telephoning "Dial-a-Bird" at 518-377-9600.

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REGION 9 — DELAWARE-HUDSON

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The drought of last fall continued thru Dec. and was not alleviated until the last week of the month when a snowfall of several inches occurred. For the next four weekends some form of precipitation fell, usually starting as snow and ending with an inch or two of rain. Since the rain washed away the snow, the ground remained exposed until Feb. when very cold temperatures prevented melting. By Jan. 25 more than 10.7 inches of precipitation had fallen, breaking the record for the month. Winter temperatures reached their depths the third week of February, when lower than -10° F was reported throughout much of the Region. Most lakes and streams did not freeze until just before the waterfowl count in mid-January, and the thaw took place in the last week of February. By the first week of March, the Hudson was free of ice in its lower reaches, and shallower ponds were beckoning to returning waterfowl—quite different from last year, when ice remained until the second week of April.

Compared with the winter season last year, this one was rather uneventful.