

REGION 8 – HUDSON-MOHAWK

RICHARD P. GUTHRIE

This has been the sort of winter that must have had some bird seed salesmen wishing that they had stayed with shoes. Mild temperatures, bare ground, open water, and plentiful wild food left little incentive for birds to take the human handouts. Some did, of course, such as the Field Sparrow that returned to the Gorman feeder in East Greenbush for the fifth consecutive year (assuming it's the same bird), and this time brought a companion! This year's list of "half-hardies"—that is, otherwise migratory species that occasionally remain into the winter—is exceptional. Ordinarily we have a few species each winter such as a Common Yellowthroat or Brown Creeper now and then—but this was a banner year! We seemed to have all of them. In addition, the open waters of the larger lakes and the Hudson, Mohawk and Hoosic Rivers resulted in unusually high numbers of waterfowl, including some species not expected here in the winter.

An extremely dry trend dominated the weather scene through the Region this winter. Less than one inch of precipitation fell over much of the area each month. The temperatures averaged above normal with a few plunges to near zero, and few reports of below zero.

Because of the rather unusual nature of this winter, one is cautioned against drawing any conclusions about apparent trends in the species reported here. We can note, however, the continued increase in Turkey population numbers and distribution. The Carolina Wren seems to be rebounding from its latest crash, while the Winter Wren remains hard to find. With the possible exception of the accipiters, the hawk numbers were noticeably down, while the reports of owls increased.

One hundred and eight species were reported through the period. Obviously, because of limited space, we cannot offer detailed accounts of each species, much as we'd like to. The following is a sort of tracking of species of special interest or those indicating subtle or obvious trends, and of course the unusual numbers or dates along with rarities for the Region.

Highlights for the period were: Green Heron, Brant, Bald Eagle, Pomarine Jaeger, Great Gray Owl, Gray Jay, Dickcissel, and Chipping Sparrow.

Abbreviations used here are: HR—Hudson River, MR—Mohawk River, TomRes—Tomhannoc Reservoir, Chat—Chatham, NB—New Baltimore, Cox—Coxsackie, ColCo—Columbia County, and CC—Christmas Count. Christmas Counts held were: Schenectady—Dec. 15, Chatham—Dec. 15, Salem—Dec. 16, So. Rensselaer—Dec. 22, Fort Plain—Dec. 23, Catskill—Coxsackie—Dec. 27, and Troy—Dec. 29.

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LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: SoRens (1st occurrence) & Troy CC. Horned Grebe: Dec. 15 MR Colonie. Pied-billed Grebe: Dec. 16 ColCo. **GREEN HERON:** one Chat. area Jan. 21 (ER). Canada Goose: 2000 Troy CC; thru Feb. 14 TomRes; 1800 Chat. CC. **BRANT:** seven Troy CC; 35 HR at Castleton in flock of Canada Geese Jan. 9 (JC). Snow Goose: Dec. 10 thru Feb. 21. Mallard: 654 Troy CC; 317 Chat. CC. Black Duck: 205 Troy CC; 57 Chat. CC. Pintail: one Troy CC thru Jan. 6; Jan. 18 Hudson. Wood Duck: two HR at Port of Albany on the SoRens. CC. Bufflehead: one Jan. 6 HR at Ft. Miller. Hooded Merganser: one Salem CC. Com. Merganser: 63 Troy CC; 14 E. Greenbush Jan. 9.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: Dec. 21 Hudson (A&TB). Goshawk: five reports Dec. 29 thru. Sharp-shinned Hawk: ten reports excluding some possible duplications. Cooper's Hawk: four reports thru period. Red-tailed Hawk: 131 total three CC's. Red-shouldered Hawk: one Chat CC. Rough-legged Hawk: numbers way down. **BALD EAGLE:** one ad, Feb. 23 HR at Four-mile Point. Marsh Hawk: thru max nine Cox Flats Feb. 23. Bobwhite: 16 Chat. CC. Turkey: 43 Chat. CC; lesser numbers, widely reported thru period. Virginia Rail: one Ghent Jan. 6 (B&HG). Am. Coot: one Salem CC; two Troy CC and one at NB Jan. 1 & 20. Killdeer: four Chat. CC and one Cox Flats Feb. 23. **POMARINE JAEGER:** one imm HR at Waterford Dec. 29 & 30. Photographs compared to specimen series at American Museum of Natural History (RPG *et al.*). Iceland Gull: one Troy CC; also Jan. 8 MR at Colonie.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: 568 Chat. CC; 392 SoRens. CC. Screech Owl: 14 reported incl. one taking mice from NB feeder nightly. Great Horned Owl: 25 reported incl. seven SoRens. CC. Barred Owl: three reports. **GREAT GRAY OWL:** one Jan. 21-22 Carmen, Schen. Co., photographs (LT). Short-eared Owl: Feb. 10-23 Cox Flats max six. Saw-whet Owl: one found dead Rensselaer (PC). Belted Kingfisher: numerous reports thru Feb. 1, max five SoRens CC. Com. Flicker: many thru period, max 12 Chat. CC. Pileated Woodpecker: at least 15 reported. Red-bellied Woodpecker: 1 Chat. CC (DA). Red-headed Woodpecker: Dec. 6, 8 & 12 ColCo (KD). Hairy Woodpecker: 46 SoRens. CC; 21 Chat. CC; 18 Troy CC, rather high numbers. Downy Woodpecker: 101 SoRensCC; 59 Chat. CC; 28 Troy CC.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: scattered flocks, max 540 Chat. CC. **GRAY JAY:** five reports as follows: Dec. 9 Troy; Dec. 21 Glenville; Dec. 30 Niskayuna, Jan. 4 Delmar, Jan. 25 Clifton Park, each bird was reported at a feeder and staying less than 30 minutes. Blue Jay: wide disparity—304 SoRens. CC, while only 33 on the Catskill count. One lucky feeder in Schenectady had 20 visiting to help them dispose of all that sunflower seed. Black-capped Chickadee: despite some reports of few at feeders, the SoRens CC had an impressive 561 and Troy 308. White-breasted Nuthatch: the SoRens CC had 108 equaling the total of all the rest of the counts. Red-breasted Nuthatch: one each Chat. and SoRens CC's. Brown Creeper: widespread and frequently reported; 26 reported, max six NB Jan. 26. Winter Wren: one Dec. 22 Glenmont, only report. Carolina Wren: five widely scattered reports. Mockingbird: 89 reports. Gray Catbird: one Chat. Dec. 10 (KD). Hermit Thrush: one Feb. 4 Chat. (KD). E. Bluebird: a refreshing 44 reported; a good omen? Golden-crowned Kinglet: Chat. Dec. 23 (DA); Hudson thru Jan. 19. No. Shrike: one each Jan. 1 Stoney Creek & Ft. Plain Dec. 23, quite a contrast to last year's plethora of reports.

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: at least 11 reported thru Feb. 24. Com. Yellowthroat: two Collins Lake, Scotia Dec. 15.

WEAVERS-SPARROWS: E. Meadowlark: widespread, max 60 Feb. 19 Castleton. No. Oriole: one Dec. 17-19 Schenectady. Cardinal: 314 reported. **DICKCISSEL:** one at feeder Dec. 16 Salem, Washington Co. (RPG *et al.*). Evening Grosbeak: generally scarce with spotty distribution, good numbers from CC's, max 137 SoRens CC. Purple Finch: even scarcer, max 21 Chat. CC. House Finch: 590 reported incl. 209 Chat. CC and 107 Ft. Plain CC. Pine Grosbeak: only four reported. Pine Siskin: one Ft. Plain CC. Red Crossbill:

six Stoney Creek, WarrensCo. Jan. 1 (RPY). Rufous-sided Towhee: two reported, one Jan. 5-Feb. 17 Schen. and one Dec. 15-Feb. 27 Meutekill, ColCo. Savannah Sparrow: two Feb. 13 Cox Flats. Vesper Sparrow: one Feb. 20 Colonie, only report. **CHIPPING SPARROW:** one at feeder Jan. 5 thru (DS). Field Sparrow: two at the E. Greenbush feeder where one has wintered the last five years (BG). White-throated Sparrow: 222 reported. Swamp Sparrow: three SoRens. CC. Song Sparrow: 118 reported. Lapland Longspur: only four reported. Snow Bunting: 138 reported monthly from ColCo.

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REGION 9 — DELAWARE-HUDSON

EDWARD D. TREACY

It seems strange to think of this as a winter report. Where was the winter? Temperatures rarely went below freezing, and never approached 0° F. About two inches of snow fell Dec. 19, and that was it until Feb. 16, when about four inches fell. A one inch deposit on Feb. 22 finished the season. Precipitation was so scarce that a serious drought could occur this summer if spring rains don't make up the loss. For the first time in history, hiking trails in Palisades Park were closed in winter due to dryness. The New York Weather Bureau was quoting snowfall for the season in the amount of 8.2 inches when the average is about 30.3 inches. Lakes and streams were completely open until Dec. 31, when shallower ones froze. Most were open for the entire Waterfowl Count period producing record counts. The Hudson finally froze Jan. 31, but was open again by the end of the third week of February.

The mild weather and open water encouraged most species of waterfowl to remain rather than migrate for the season, and the lack of snow provided excellent food for many of the passerines, so much so that feeder counts were at an all time low. Winter finches were nonexistent, except for a few Evening Grosbeaks, and one report of four White-winged Crossbills. Birders who took to the field on Christmas Counts were well rewarded. Most counts broke records in numbers of species and individuals. The Federation Waterfowl Count was the biggest ever. The 14,862 individuals counted was four times larger than the previous high of 3,684 set in 1970, and the 25 species found surpassed the 21 species record set in 1965. Of course we will never know how much the mild weather and open water affected the count, or did the excellent coverage this year play a bigger role?

Several observers commented on the abundance of local hawks, and surmised that lack of competition from absent wintering northern visitors might have had some effect.

Contributors and observers cited: Al Brayton, Tom Burke, Robert F. Deed, Stan DeOrsey, Ken McDermott, John C. Orth, Eleanor Pink, Benton Seguin, Dr. John Tramontano, Ed Treacy, Berna Weissman.