

REGION 10 – MARINE

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Early December's relatively mild weather was broken abruptly by the arrival of extremely cold and bitter weather on Christmas Day with 0° F. temperatures or lower, and strong NW winds. January remained cold. Bays and harbors were frozen over, as was Jerome Reservoir; the Hudson River was clogged with ice, and Long Island Sound at the narrow western end appeared frozen to the Westchester shore. The normal mean temperature in January in the city is 32.2° F. The mean this year was 26.3° F., four degrees below average. Precipitation was far below normal, with only half an inch during January. Snow cover melted or blew off before Brant were seriously stressed. After a brief cold snap, February was six degrees warmer than average, with a mean temperature of 39.3° F. Precipitation was twice the average with six inches recorded. The third week of February was like April with temperatures ranging as high as 68° F. Signs of the coming breeding season were observable by the end of January and into the first days of February as Cardinals, House Finches, titmice, and Horned Larks were singing, and Herring Gulls in full breeding plumage were paired off on their breeding grounds.

Christmas Count Highlights

For the fourth straight year the Montauk count was highest in New York State, with 130 species plus "Ipswich" Sparrow, a total achieved three times previously in 1971, 1978, and 1979. The Montauk participants were celebrating the 50th count anniversary, but had to be satisfied with tying the previous high. A female Barrow's Goldeneye was new to the count. Of interest were a Willet, two Lesser Black-backed Gulls, a Razorbill, a Dovekie, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, and two Yellow-breasted Chats. 458 Black-capped Chickadees was a record high. Birds missed by counters included regulars such as American Woodcock, Brown-headed Cowbird, Barn Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Black-crowned Night Heron. So it would seem that the 130 barrier can be broken—maybe next year. The compilation of 50 years of count data is a credit to Ben Trimble and Bob Paxton, co-compilers of the count, and serves as a valuable reference to reduce extravagant interpretations about trends and populations.

The next highest count in Region 10 belonged to Central Suffolk with 125 species, plus "Ipswich" Sparrow, an amazing total considering the day was their coldest yet with temperatures ranging from -1° to 10° F. The total was their fourth highest ever, and the best since 1975. The rarest species was a Short-billed Marsh Wren. Other uncommon species included Great Cormorant, Snow Goose, Wood Duck, Goshawk (third time), Greater Yellowlegs, Laughing Gull, Saw-whet Owl (second time), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Phoebe, Cedar Waxwing, Red Crossbill and Lapland Longspur. Missed species included Red-throated Loon, Bald Eagle and Rusty Blackbird. This count has now seen 197 species over 28 years. Fifty species have occurred every year and 22 were missed only once or twice. At the other extreme, 39 species were found only once or twice.

The Captree count totaled 116 species plus "Blue" Goose. Lincoln's Sparrow was new to the count. A near record high of 484 Black-capped Chickadees was found. Of interest: Merlin, Goshawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Iceland Gull.

The Southern Nassau count tallied 115 species in bitter, windy weather. Included were a Merlin, two Iceland Gulls, and a Water Pipit. Common and Red-throated Loons were missed.

The Northern Nassau count was uneventful with an average total of 103 species plus "Blue" Goose. Of interest were three Pine Grosbeaks, the only ones reported this winter, a Cooper's Hawk, two Red-shouldered Hawks, Merlin, Long-billed Marsh Wren, Chipping Sparrow and a Northern Oriole. Also noteworthy was the absence of loons, Redheads, scoters, Clapper Rail, and most shorebirds; 909 Black-capped Chickadees were found on this count.

Brooklyn counters found 103 species including two Red-necked Grebes, immature White-fronted Goose, Peregrine Falcon, a chat, and two Orange-crowned Warblers.

The Queens count totaled an average 102 species including an adult White-fronted Goose, four Snowy Owls, Lesser Yellowlegs, dowitcher sp., Peregrine, Glaucous Gull, and Eastern Phoebe.

Staten Islanders found 90 species including seven Rough-legged Hawks, a Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Eastern Phoebe, and a Northern Oriole. Over thirty-three thousand Herring Gulls were counted. A count of 95 Purple Sandpipers exceeded the sum of all of the other counts manyfold.

Gyr Falcon

Without a doubt the bird of the season was the immature white-phase Gyr Falcon first found January 26 at Lawrence by Mike Scheibel. For full account, see "Notes and Observations," page 82.

Federation Pelagic Trip

The winter pelagic trip December 6 aboard the Finback I proceeded to a point 40 miles off shore south of Montauk Point. Species encountered included 25 Gannets, 500 Black-legged Kittiwakes, seven unidentified alcids, three Dovekies, one Black Guillemot near the point, and two Snow Buntings (one 40 miles from shore).

Rarities for the season include: White-fronted Goose, Barrow's Goldeneye, Gyr Falcon, Thayer's Gull, Black Guillemot, Hoary Redpoll, Harris' Sparrow. Positive notes for the season include: Buffleheads in good numbers, Red-shouldered Hawks in better numbers than in recent years, Red-tailed Hawks in good numbers, interesting white-winged gulls, good numbers of Rough-legged Hawks, a good show of Snowy Owls, and large numbers of Black-capped Chickadees on the counts. Negative aspects of the winter include: loons and grebes very scarce, all scoters in small numbers, Great Blue Herons low, Tree Sparrows scarce in some regions, Pine Siskins largely absent after vast numbers passed along the beaches last fall, crossbills almost unreported, few Evening Grosbeaks, eiders in low numbers, Black-billed Plovers low, small land birds generally low in Suffolk County, Winter Wrens scarce, Saw-whet Owls suffered road kills along Jones Beach with a minimum of eight found, and two killed by larger predators.

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LOONS—DUCKS: Com. Loon numbers seemed very low everywhere except in the Montauk count circle where 91 were found. This number is less than the mean (130) for the last 20 years (range 11 in 1965 to 455 in 1967). Red-throated Loons also seemed low. The Montauk tally of 16 is below the 20 year mean of 30 (range 3 to 101). Two Red-necked Grebes were found on the Montauk count; one was at Shoreham Jan. 19, three at Mecox Feb. 28 (DL). While Horned Grebes seemed scarce elsewhere, the Montauk count found 222, the second highest tally (max 2000 in 1957). Pied-billed Grebes were sparingly reported. Five were in salt water near Lawrence in Jan. Great Cormorant numbers vary considerably (0 to 357 at Montauk over 20 years). This year's total of 59 was below average. Twenty-six were found on the N. Nassau count, about average. A single Double-crested Cormorant was on the Montauk count. On Dec. 2, on a SE wind, 500-600 Gannets were moving west, working off Shinnecock Inlet. Great Blue Herons seemed fewer in number this winter, yet data from N. Nassau showed 14, within the five year range of 11-20. Similarly the Montauk number, 15, was within a ten year range of 7 to 40. Black-crowned Night Heron was missed on the Montauk count yet appeared in average numbers elsewhere. A late Snowy Egret was present Dec. 1 at Southampton and Dec. 2 at Jones Beach (GSR). A total of 968 Mute Swans was located on the Central Suffolk count (369 last year), 56 in N. Nassau (55 last year), and 74 at Montauk, its highest count (45 last year). This species seems to be exploding in Suffolk county. Do Mute Swans from Connecticut winter in Suffolk County? Brant seemed present in numbers similar to recent years. The previously reported immature **WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** lingered at Jamaica Bay until Jan. 2. An adult **WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE** was present among a flock of feral Canadas in Lake Success Dec. 20-21 (J. Pion *et al.*). Race was not determined as descriptions of bill color differed. Scattered reports of Snow Geese in small numbers were received. Mallards appear to remain in stable numbers on all counts. Black Ducks continue to outnumber Mallards in C. Suffolk (3414 to 2970). Two Blue-winged Teals on the C. Suffolk count were good finds. Wintering drake European Wigeons were reported from Lawrence (two), Rockville Center Jan. 15 (AW), Hempstead Lake, Babylon Jan. 17 (K. Malone), and Jamaica Bay. A female was seen at Lawrence Jan. 28 (THD *et al.*). 112 Am. Wigeons in N. Nassau was low, although within a ten year range (110-631). 88 Redheads at Fort Pond Feb. 7 was a good count (*fide* L. Shore). A peak count of 1168 Canvasbacks at Jerome Res. Dec. 7 gradually dwindled to 217 Jan. 28 (WS); 2209 were reported on the Queens count, 908 on Captree. 29 Lesser Scaup in C. Suffolk was a good number; one to 18 over the winter at Jerome Res. represents a reduction over recent years (WS). A high count of 902 Com. Goldeneyes was found in N. Nassau. Three female **BARROW'S GOLDENEYES** were reported: one was at Montauk Dec. 20-Jan. 25 (P. Buckley, K. Able, BJS *et al.*), one Jan. 19 at Jones Inlet (B. Benjamin), and a different bird there Jan. 25 (SBD, S. Schiff). Only four Harlequin Ducks were reported: a drake flew by Democrat Point Dec. 28 (K. Malone), another drake was at Montauk Point Jan. 11, and a female was at the Point Jan. 15-Feb. 21 (BJS, B. Benjamin *et al.*), a female at Long Beach Feb. 16 (P. Gillen), and a female at Lawrence marsh (O. Dunning). Com. Eiders were scarce at Montauk this winter; 26 were on the count. Seven King Eiders were present. 20 Com. Mergansers at Lawrence Jan. 28 was a good concentration.

HAWKS—ALCIDS: A single Turkey Vulture was studied in Syosset Jan. 19 (C. Brogan). Three Goshawks appeared on the N. Nassau count, about average. Sharp-shinned Hawks were widely reported: *nine* on the Montauk count was high, two were in N. Nassau, seven in C. Suffolk, and three at Captree. Scattered reports of single birds were also received. A Cooper's Hawk wintered in Muttontown (K. Stier, W. Patterson) where they are present in the breeding season. One Cooper's was at Manorville Feb. 22 (GSR). Rough-legged Hawks were present in higher than usual numbers throughout the Region. A max of seven Dec. 20 on the S.I. count, up to six wintered along the Jones Beach strip, several wintered around Montauk, and scattered reports came from Nassau and Suffolk. Red-shouldered Hawks were

more widely reported than in recent years: two on the N. Nassau count, one S.I., one Captree, one in Sands Point Jan. 25 (BJS), one along the Long Island Expressway in Nassau Feb. 28 (GSR), and one at Jones Beach Dec. 21 (EL). 25 Marsh Hawks were found on the S.I. count, 19 at Montauk, about average. A Golden Eagle wintered on Shelter Island at the newly established Mashomack Preserve, an area not too accessible to the public. A Bald Eagle in second or third winter plumage wintered in the Mill Neck area (R. Sabin *et al.*). The imm white-phase GYRFALCON first seen Jan. 26 was last seen Mar. 6. It was most frequently seen on the Lawrence marsh in part because that spot was most accessible to birders. The gyr ranged east to Jones Beach, and was seen at a number of locations between the two points. It lived handsomely, dining on waterfowl including Brant, Black Ducks, and teal. Among spin-off sightings by hopeful gyr watchers was a Beluga Whale in Jones Inlet Feb. 28 (BJS). Several Peregrine Falcons wintered in the Region: one was seen Dec. 19 at Willowbrook S.I. (B. Paul, H. Jenkins); probably the same bird was found the next day on the S.I. count. Single Peregrines were seen Dec. 20 on the Queens count and the Brooklyn count. An individual was present in the Lawrence marsh and Long Beach area during Feb. Merlins were well represented on counts: four were in C. Suffolk, one Captree, and one N. Nassau. A Merlin was seen Jan. 10 at Mecox (DL), and at least one wintered at Jones Beach. A Merlin took a Mourning Dove at a feeder in Southold Jan. 23 (*vide* A. Dove). Bobwhite numbers seemed better in C. Suffolk with 237 on the count, after several low years. Similarly N. Nassau found 71, comparable to figures five years ago. 17 Turkeys were found on the Captree count, all in Connetquot; 55 were on Gardiner's Island, and two on Shelter Island Jan. 21 (GSR). Three Virginia Rails on the Montauk count was better than usual. Seven on the C. Suffolk count were good. The only Sora reported was seen Dec. 21 at Jones Beach (EL, C. Ward). 34 Ruddy Turnstones on the Montauk count was their second highest tally; 38 were on the S.I. count. Jan. 25 ten were present at the west end of Jones Beach (*vide* L. Schore). A Willet appeared on the Montauk count for the second year in a row. A sprinkling of Greater Yellowlegs wintered: two in C. Suffolk, one Jan.-1 at Eastport (GSR), one in Hempstead Harbor (B. Forquer). A Lesser Yellowlegs was found Dec. 20 at JFK Airport (S. Chevalier, A. & H. Richard). Five Red Knots were seen Dec. 13, and three Dec. 20 at Shinnecock (GSR). There were five Purple Sandpipers at Montauk, and 150 were at Great Kills mudflat Jan. 3, and 130 at Jones Beach west end Jan. 25 (*vide* L. Schore). Two Long-billed Dowitchers were at Lawrence Feb. 6 (W. Reilly *et al.*). A dowitcher sp. was found at Atlantic Beach on the Queens count. A Marbled Godwit lingered until Dec. 29 at Jamaica Bay (P. Buckley). A Red Phalarope among Sanderlings was carefully studied Jan. 24 at the "Sore Thumb" near Oak Beach (A. Townsend). Single Glaucous Gulls were reported on the Montauk count (first year), from Noyak (second year) Jan. 21 (DL), Great Kills mudflat Feb. 16 (GB), one was at North Sea Jan. 21 (GSR), and Jones Beach Feb. 21 (GSR). A second year Glaucous was at Jamaica Bay Feb. 28 (R. Hines). The "Kumlien's" Gull returned this winter to the restaurant at Jones Beach for the fifth winter. Iceland Gulls were also noted on S.I.: two (one adult, one imm) at the Muldoon Ave. landfill Jan. 10 (H. Fischer, GB & B. Bouquio), a first year bird Feb. 7 at Crooke's Point, and a second year bird Feb. 22 at Great Kills. A second year bird was seen at Atlantic Beach Feb. 28 (R. Hines). A first year THAYER'S GULL was carefully studied at False Point, Montauk Dec. 7, by two observers, one experienced with *thayeri* in the middle west. Distinctions from *Larus glaucooides kumlieni* were verified at the AMNH. Details to NYSARC (BJS, P. Snetsinger). The only other record of Thayer's Gull on Long Island appears in *Audubon Field Notes*, Vol. 23, No. 1, as a "probable." However, one of the observers, Paul Buckley, has retracted that record, observing that the bird was probably a dark-pigmented *kumlieni* (pers. comm. to THD). An adult and an imm Lesser Black-backed Gull were found Dec. 20 at Montauk (P. Buckley, K. Able). A second winter Lesser Black-back was seen at Sea Cliff Jan. 24 (BJS). Over 33,000 Herring Gulls were reported on S.I. where landfill operations attract them. N. Nassau had 11,000 again a dump was the major attraction; 8000 were on the Montauk count, 5000 at Captree, and 9000 on the C. Suffolk count. 4586 Ring-billed Gulls were found on the N. Nassau count, almost double the previous high count. An imm Black-headed Gull at Shinnecock

cock Inlet Dec. 6 (DL) was the only report. Little Gulls were reported Dec. 5 at Jones Inlet (*fide* THD), and at Jones Beach Feb. 28, an adult (GSR). A single Laughing Gull was found on the C. Suffolk count, the only report. Only 104 Black-legged Kittiwakes were seen on the Montauk count, far below the 1000-2000 on the last three counts. Black-legged Kittiwake tends to be a "feast or famine" bird with many years with no reports on the count. One late Black Skimmer was seen Dec. 15 at Jamaica Bay (W. Reilly *et al.*). One Razorbill was seen on the Montauk count; a badly oiled individual was found at Shinnecock Jan. 21 (DL, GSR). A Dovekie on the Montauk count and three on the Federation Pelagic trip Dec. 6 were the only reports. A first winter Black Guillemot was seen by a pleased crew of birders on the Finback I Dec. 6, and also was reported from shore (M. Cashman).

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: Several Barn Owls wintered along the Jones Beach strip; one was seen Dec. 2 at Cedar Beach (GSR, DL), one at Tobay Feb. 14 by the same observers. One was on the Captree count, and one on S.I. These numbers are about average for the Region. Wintering Screech Owls were seen sunning themselves in a hole in a tree at Cutchoque Jan. 22 (A. Dove) and Sands Point Dec. 29 and later (BJS). Another was seen near a feeder at Centereach at 10:30 PM. The owl flew to a spruce tree and captured a roosting House Sparrow (A. Otero). A gray phase Screech Owl was unusual Feb. 17 at Cold Spring Harbor where gray phase has been reported previously (S. Yeaton). Ten Screech Owls were located on the C. Suffolk count, thirteen on N. Nassau. At least two wintered at Muttontown Preserve (AL). Great Horned Owls maintained their numbers in N. Nassau with 12 reported on the count. A single individual was seen at Manorville Dec. 10, and two were on Shelter Island Dec. 29 (GSR). Five were found on the Captree count. Snowy Owls were reported regularly along the beaches this winter with a max of three at JFK airport; two or three were in the Mecox-Shinnecock region and several in between for a total of about nine along the south shore. A few reports from the center of the island were received: one Feb. 21 in Westbury (C. Undborg), and one in Williston Park Jan. 10 (R. Rosenberg), another Snowy was seen in Mill Neck Jan. 4 (*fide* H. McClure). Long-eared Owls were reported with about the usual frequency. Seven were at the Muttontown Preserve Dec. 27, and five from Jan. 22 to Feb. 10 (AL). Long-ears bred here a couple of years ago. Three Long-ears were at Pelham Bay Jan. 10 (W. Reilly *et al.*); three were in a pine grove near Lawrence marsh. Pellets picked up here revealed two chickadee skulls and two Cardinals' (SBD). Wintering individuals at Cedar Beach and along Jones Beach were variously reported. One Long-ear was in Alley Pond Park Feb. 17 (J. & J. Latil). Short-eared Owls were seen with some frequency with reports from Jamaica Bay, Lawrence and Jones Beach. Eight were found on the S.I. count. Saw-whet Owls wintered at Jamaica Bay and Jones Beach. A high count of four Jan. 4 was found at Jones Beach (W. Reilly *et al.*). A Saw-whet at Shinnecock Dec. 14 was in a less usual locality (GSR). Judging from road kills, (eight to ten), Saw-whet Owls must be quite numerous along the beach or else have a very high mortality rate in that location. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were present in greater numbers than usual: three distinct individuals were seen in Mattituck Dec. 17, Dec. 30, and Jan. 15 (A. Dove). Single sapsuckers were seen on the majority of counts. Several other scattered reports were received.

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: E. Phoebees were found on the Queens and S.I. counts, both on Dec. 20. 39 Horned Larks were present for the N. Nassau count, a high for that area; 44 were found in Queens, 249 in C. Suffolk, and 57 on S.I. Numbers seemed better than usual. A **BLACK-BILLED MAGPIE** was an exciting find Dec. 31 in Old Bethpage (AJL). Black-capped Chickadees evidently had a good year. A record 484 were on the Captree count, 508 on Montauk and 909 N. Nassau. All were high counts except for N. Nassau which had 925 in 1975. Tufted Titmouse numbers jumped to ten birds at Montauk as this species moves eastward. The previous "high" was two birds last year; two single occurrences were listed prior to that. N. Nassau had 112 a high, Captree 71, 52 in C. Suffolk, and 37 on S.I. 57 Red-breasted Nuthatches on the Montauk count was a very high count, far exceeding last year's total. Other counts had average numbers. 40 Brown Creepers on the C. Suffolk count was a very high number. In comparison N. Nassau saw five, Montauk three, Captree

16, and S.I. three. Winter Wrens seemed scarce this winter: eight on the N. Nassau count was the biggest concentration. 30 Carolina Wrens were on Gardiner's Island for the Montauk count, fewer than in recent years, but still the greatest concentration in the Region. Five were in N. Nassau, five on S.I. and eight in C. Suffolk, numbers that seemed about average. 15 Carolinas were found on Shelter Island Dec. 29 (GSR). Three Long-billed Marsh Wrens were located, one at Montauk Point Dec. 7 (F. Scheider), one on the N. Nassau count Dec. 28, and one in Sand's Point Jan. 25 (G. Quinn). The only Short-billed Marsh Wren was found on the C. Suffolk count Dec. 26 at Westhampton Beach (DL). An imm No. Shrike was seen at Muttontown Jan. 20-23 (K. Stier, W. Patterson). Gyrfalcon seekers saw another No. Shrike at Lawrence marsh Feb. 14. A Loggerhead Shrike was sighted at JFK airport Feb. 22 (A. & H. Richard).

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: Two Orange-crowned Warblers were highlights of the Brooklyn count Dec. 20. A high count of 8672 Yellow-rumped Warblers were on the Captree count. Elsewhere they appeared in average numbers. A late Ovenbird was present Nov. 15-Dec. 4 in Central Park (P. Tozzi *et al.*), and at a small park on 48th St. E. of Broadway on Dec. 12 (H. Tretault *et al.*). Three Com. Yellowthroats remained for the Montauk count. One was seen in C. Suffolk, and one at Captree. Two Yellow-breasted Chats were found on the Montauk count, one in Brooklyn, and a chat lingered at Pelham Bay Park until Dec. 20 (*vide* I. Cantor).

WEAVERS-SPARROWS: Two No. Orioles lingered for counts: one on S.I., the other in N. Nassau. The latter bird was present at a feeder in Roslyn from Dec. 12 (H. Roth) while the S.I. bird alternated between two feeders during Dec. and Jan. (*vide* GB). 16 Rusty Blackbirds were at a feeder in Glen Cove Nov.-Jan. (AL, LL). Brown-headed Cowbirds numbered 340 in a large flock in Riverdale Dec. 4 (WS); 156 were found on the S.I. count. This is one species that arouses dubious emotions when large numbers are reported. Cardinals sometimes exhibit the flocking behavior familiar in other finches: 26 were in one group in Glen Cove Jan. 8 (AL, LL). The only Dickcissel reported was a male seen Feb. 4 at a feeder in Manhasset (P. Gillen). Evening Grosbeaks were present in small numbers at feeders in Dec. but had largely disappeared as the winter went on. Purple Finches were very sparingly reported in twos and threes throughout the season. The only Pine Grosbeaks were three found in Muttontown Dec. 27 (J. Rinaldo). A **HOARY REDPOLL** was carefully studied Jan. 13 at Brookhaven Lab while it was feeding on weed stalks with Song Sparrows (DL, GSR *et al.*). Details to NYSARC. Four Com. Redpolls were found Dec. 7 at Montauk (DWC *et al.*), 11 were on the Bronx count Dec. 28, ten showed up in Port Washington Feb. 5 (B. Forquer). Scattered small numbers and single birds were also reported. Pine Siskins present in the thousands along the beaches in the fall moved on with few remaining for the winter. Four Red Crossbills on the C. Suffolk count Dec. 26 and four on the Orient count Dec. 29 (GSR) were the only reports. White-winged Crossbills went unreported in a sparse winter finch year. "Ipswich" Sparrows continue to be reported from the beaches in the usual modest numbers. Two Vesper Sparrows were found on the Montauk count, and one on C. Suffolk. This species seems very reduced in transit as well as a breeding bird. Two Chipping Sparrows were present at a feeder in Sands Point for the N. Nassau count, and remained after that date. An apparent imm **HARRIS' SPARROW** appeared at a feeder in E. Islip Jan. 8 where it was compared with English Sparrows, Fox Sparrow, and Hermit Thrush. The bird was photographed, but unfortunately the slides did not turn out and positive confirmation was lost (D. House). A Lincoln's Sparrow, rare at this season, was seen Dec. 20 at Heckscher Park (R. O'Mally). Lapland Longspurs were present in unusual numbers in a flock of 120 Jan. 4-18 in East Rockaway (R. Arbib, THD *et al.*). 17 were at the west end of Jones Beach Dec. 7 (DWC), and a flock of five at Halsey Pond Jan. 2 (G. & M. Dremeaux). Other scattered reports of single birds were received.

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