

REGION 5 — ONEIDA LAKE BASIN

PAUL A. DEBENEDICTIS

This report really treats two seasons: the winter 1980-1981, and the last two weeks of February! As heating bills amply attested, the winter 1980-1981 was exceptionally cold from mid-December through mid-February. Most open water was frozen by the time of the Christmas Bird Counts, and Christmas morning saw Syracuse at 22 below. This record low was followed by four new record lows set during January, when temperatures averaged seven degrees below normal. February averaged almost ten degrees below normal in spite of the month's surprising ending. Precipitation was sparse, and at the end of the season snowfall in Syracuse totaled only 68 inches, two feet below normal, and all but about two feet of that was lake-effect snow.

This should have set the scene for a very dull winter, but it was not. Surprisingly large numbers and variety of birds persisted through the winter, and waterfowl concentrations in Oswego Harbor (almost the only open area) were the best in several years. There was an exceptional incursion of Rough-legged Hawks, particularly in Oswego County, but no other raptors were present in above average numbers. Northern Shrikes were scarcer than any winter in the past seventeen years.

Irruptive passerines were conspicuous, but not overwhelming in numbers. It appears that ample wild seed crops kept many of these species from feeders, and numbers are hard to assess. Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches persisted in above average numbers through the entire winter at feeders. Evening Grosbeaks, Pine Grosbeaks and redpolls were widespread but not especially abundant anywhere. Pine Siskins were a little more numerous, but Purple Finches and crossbills were almost nonexistent.

A surprising variety of "half-hardy" species were found, and an equally surprising variety were missed this winter. Enjoying good berry crops, American Robins and Cedar Waxwings were widespread and numerous. Our few Carolina Wrens apparently survived through at least early February. Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Tufted Titmice, and Mockingbirds were reported widely, but from few new localities, and were joined by a few Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers, and Rufous-sided Towhees. White-throated Sparrows actually outnumbered Song Sparrows this winter. Killdeers, Winter Wrens, Hermit Thrushes, icterids except perhaps Brown-headed Cowbird, Tree Sparrows, and juncos were scarce, and no Field or Swamp Sparrows were reported by anyone.

The last two weeks of February were a season unto themselves. Suddenly the thermometer climbed, the snow melted and four record high temperatures were set in Syracuse. February 19, 22 and 28 saw the arrival of waterfowl, particularly Canada Geese, in numbers. With exceptionally favorable conditions, Derby Hill produced 701 raptors, mostly Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, among which were record early dates for Turkey Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Bald Eagle. Crows, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Common Grackles became conspicuous everywhere, while lesser numbers of Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings, but few other passerines, added to the excitement.

Observers in the Region reported 113 species and 2 hybrids during the winter. By far the most unusual of these was a Pomarine Jaeger, and a probable Hoary Redpoll was also seen. Other notable species reported were: Barrow's Goldeneye, King Eider, Bald Eagle, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, and Savannah Sparrow.

Contributors: G. Church, D. W. Crumb, R. L. Evans, J. Hanyak, G. Huggins, S. Kahl, D. G. Muir, B. & S. Peebles, M. S. Rusk, F. G. Scheider, G. A. Smith, M. Stooks, E. VanDresar.

Abbreviations: arr—arrival, BBFS—Ben Burt feeder surveys (*vide* MSR), DH—Derby Hill Bird Observatory, LOL—Lake Ontario littoral, Onon—Onondaga, Syr—Syracuse.

LOONS—DUCKS: Com. Loon: last 20 Dec. Syr. Red-necked Grebe: last 20 Dec. Syr, then one Manlius 20-25 Jan. (DWC, JH). Horned Grebe: last 25 Jan. Oswego. Pied-billed Grebe: no more than two overwintered, low. Great Blue Heron: scattered singles are about normal, and as usual the only long-legged wader found. Mute Swan: one 10 Jan. to 14 Feb. Oswego. Canada Goose: all but a handful gone by mid-Dec., then arr with very large flights (low 1000's) 22 and 28 Feb. Mallard x Gadwall: one Cayuga Lake on 10 Jan. (MSR). Gadwall: less than six overwintered, very low. Pintail: arr 16 Feb. DH. Am. Wigeon: arr 21 Feb. DH. Wood Duck: one persisted 10-24 Jan. on Oswego R. Redhead: only one report of more than ten until return about 19 Feb., low. Ring-necked Duck: one persisted Brewerton to 10 Jan., arr LOL 21 Feb. Canvasback: to 40/day Oswego. Greater Scaup: to 1600/day Oswego. Lesser Scaup: max about six Oswego. Com. Goldeneye: to 700/day Oswego. Barrow's Goldeneye: male Oswego R. 17 Feb. only, species now almost annual. Oldsquaw: to 100/day Oswego. Three to six King Eiders and three to eight White-winged Scoters at Oswego 10 Jan. to 17 Feb., a Surf Scoter with them 10 to 18 Jan. Com. Merganser: to 1900/day at Oswego, very good numbers for recent years.

HAWKS—ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: two at DH 22 Feb., record early. Cooper's Hawk: arr DH 19 Feb., record early there but the species is regular in winter throughout the Region. Goshawk: only four reported all winter, and scarce in DH hawk flights. Red-shouldered Hawk: one at DH 27 Feb., record early by one day. Bald Eagle: adult, imm DH on 28 Feb., record early. Am. Coot: one-three/day, mostly at Oswego, somewhat low. Killdeer: two Camillus valley in Jan. was only report all winter, very low; only two in Feb. movements at DH. Com. Snipe: one-three/day, about normal. POMARINE JAEGER: imm light morph at Oswego 10 Jan., with excellent details by MSR, our first real winter record of a jaeger of any sort. Glaucous Gull: max only five/day, low. Iceland Gull: max only two/day, very low. Great Black-backed Gull: to 300/day at Oswego during Jan. Herring Gull: max about 1200/day at Oswego. Ring-billed Gull: about 4000 at Oswego through Jan., then steady decline to about 500/day at end of Feb.

PIGEONS—WOODPECKERS: Snowy Owl: total of five reported, mostly for short stays at any one locality. Short-eared Owl: to 17 in roost town of Hastings through 22 Dec.; single Syr. 20 Dec. Long-eared Owl: one on Shackham Road, southern Onon Co., 17 Feb. only. Saw-whet Owl: single Holland Patent on 24 Jan. (EV). Red-headed Woodpecker: imm at Pennellville 18 Jan. on. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: two Syr on 20 Dec., one persisting through 1 Jan. (GH).

FLYCATCHERS—STARLINGS: Horned Lark: arr 5 Feb.; 639 over DH by end of season. Com. Crow: to 50/day through the winter, 22,000 over DH in the last two weeks of Feb. Black-capped Chickadee: to 40/day in casual birding and somewhat higher than average on BBFS. Tufted Titmouse: widespread, up to three/day during the winter. Winter Wren: one Camillus Valley on 24 Jan. was only report. Carolina Wren: all of the six birds on BBFS in early Dec. survived through at least early Feb. Gray Catbird: one Hannibal on 21 Dec. (MSR), another in DeWitt on 3 Jan. (GH). Brown Thrasher: one Holland Patent 4-10

Jan. (RE). Am. Robin: to 930/day southern Onondaga Co., and widespread and somewhat more numerous than usual in the northern part of the county; no influx at the season's end. Hermit Thrush: only three or four reported, somewhat low. Eastern Bluebird: arr DH 21 Feb., first Feb. record for Oswego Co. No. Shrike: six birds reported from four localities, non-persistent, very low.

VIREOS—WARBLERS: "Myrtle" Warbler: two Syr. on 20 Dec., one Nedrow on 24 Jan.

WEAVERS—SPARROWS: Red-winged Blackbird: last (except one or two stragglers at feeders) in mid-Dec., then arr 17 Feb., widespread and numerous by 21 Feb.; total of 117,000 seen passing DH between 17 and 22 Feb. Rusty Blackbird: three to five DeWitt through the winter, no migrants yet. Com. Grackle: same story as Red-winged Blackbird, arr 19 Feb. Brown-headed Cowbird: to 40/day, mostly at feeders, through the winter, and only a small increase during late Feb. Rose-breasted Grosbeak: last Marcellus early Dec. (BBFS). Evening Grosbeak: widespread but only to about 70/day. Purple Finch: singles during Jan. and Feb. were the only reliable reports, now that House Finches are ubiquitous. Pine Grosbeak: mostly reported from the highlands, to about 18/day. Com. Redpoll: to about 100/day, best counts from Pompey township. Hoary Redpoll: one probable (rump not seen) Pompey township, 13 to 30 Jan. (DWC). Pine Siskin: very widespread, to about 20/day; 50% higher on Feb. BBFS than previous record. Red Crossbill: two at DH 23 Feb., only report. White-winged Crossbill: two Pompey 9 Dec., then eight reported from three localities after 14 Feb. Rufous-sided Towhee: one Eaton 18 Dec. to 8 Feb. (GC), four on Jan. BBFS, none in Feb. Savannah Sparrow: one in DeWitt on 31 Dec. (MSR), very late. Dark-eyed Junco: scarce, best counts only 10/day. Tree Sparrow: low, best counts about 60/day. White-crowned Sparrow: adult Oneida 3 Dec. to 15 Feb. (B & SP), imm Syr on 4 Feb. (MSR). White-throated Sparrow: widespread, to 16/day through the winter, highest on BBFS since 1974-75. Song Sparrow: very scarce, no more than 3/day, and just a hint of an influx in late Feb. Lapland Longspur: arr early Feb., about 30 over DH at end of month. Snow Bunting: almost none Dec. and Jan., arr early Feb. and 1223 over DH during the last two weeks of that month.

Corrigendum: Summer 1980 report, Cape May Warbler: Georgetown is in Madison, not Monroe, County.

306 Kensington Place, Syracuse, New York 13210

REGION 6 — ST. LAWRENCE

LEE CHAMBERLAINE

Winter of 1980-81 was a strange one indeed. Snowfall was way below normal with even Tug Hill not exceeding the sixty inch mark.

December started out warm and a temperature of 51° F. was experienced on the 8th, but on Christmas Day the official temperature in Watertown was -34° F, which was an indication of things to come in January.

Two words—*bitter* and *cold*—can best describe January. Temperatures of -20° F. to -45° F. were the rule, rather than the exception. Highs for the day got up to anywhere from -20° F. to -10° F. If one took time to figure out the wind chill factor they wished they hadn't since on some days they were in the -60° F. range and caution to protect any exposed flesh was the rule.