

REGION 3 – FINGER LAKES

DICK CLEMENTS

This winter period certainly provided a variety of temperatures and precipitation. Above normal temperatures in early December lulled us into thoughts of a mild winter. Precipitation averaged around 4.5 inches, mostly in the form of rain. Unfortunately, the Siberian Express moved in the latter part of the month, dropping overnight temperatures to -20 degrees and daytime temperatures barely climbing above zero.

January brought below normal precipitation as well as more of the Express with more record low temperatures. February was the month to get even with your utility company as temperatures averaged seven degrees above normal. Heavy rains in mid-month produced some minor local flooding. Balmy weather stimulated heavy Canada Goose migration the second half of the month when temperatures hit above 60 degrees. A winter storm hit the last days of February when a mixture of freezing rain, sleet and snow fell on our area. Total accumulation was only a few inches, nothing compared to the horrendous amounts received in other areas. Snow cover was thin as usual throughout the period. One wonders when our turn for a snowy winter will come.

Bird observations were often done out of dedication rather than enjoyment. The bitter weather no doubt was the cause of the increase in waterfowl species and numbers as the ponds and lakes froze over in the north. Frozen shallow water also caused birds to congregate on our lakes. Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge's December duck count was two species, less than a thousand birds, compared to 12 species and around 200,000 birds (mostly Mallards) in 1983. We enjoyed healthy populations of Snow Buntings, Horned Larks and American Tree Sparrows. The cold did not deter American Robins, Eastern Bluebirds and Carolina Wrens as they were well represented.

Christmas Bird Counts produced some interesting results. Ithaca had record numbers for 18 species. Elmira had two firsts but also record lows for three species. Schuyler County had one first with high counts for three species. The composite total was 84 species for the five Christmas counts. After reading reports from Seneca Falls and Watkins Glen concerning decreased House Finch numbers, one might conclude that the population is leveling off. Ithaca shoots that theory down with a total of 1,878 birds on the Christmas count, more than double last year's number. Your editor's feeders in Pine City swelled to over 200, creating too much noise for the Northern Cardinals to feed in peace.

The Horned Grebe wins the "most popular bird" award not only by its record numbers throughout our region but also because two were rescued. John and Karen Confer brought a downed bird into their home on 27 December. Through tender loving care, including lots of force-fed smelt, the revitalized bird was released on Cayuga Lake on 31 December. On 28 December another bird was found frozen in the ice on the Chemung River in Elmira. Lana Andrus of the Chemung County Humane Society cared for the bird and eventually gave it to the Seneca Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. Congratulations to those who cared and may others learn by your example.

The Payment in Kind (PIK) Program whereby farmers are compensated for leaving potential grain fields unplanted has resulted in more weedy fields in the Southern Tier. The program is short-termed but may already be responsible for the lower numbers of wintering icterids, the shift of Wild Turkey populations and increase in the number of sparrows in our area.

Our only real rarity was a male Varied Thrush. This is only the second sighting for our region. The bird was located north of Ithaca at the home of Bill Cogshall. Dorothy McIlroy and other observers report that the bird was keeping some interesting company, namely a flock of 50 American Robins, several species of sparrows, a Red-bellied Woodpecker and occasionally a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Seasonal negatives have to include the absence of crossbills, and Pine Grosbeaks, the almost nonexistent Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins, and no Snowy Owl reports.

Best wishes for a speedy return to normal go out to Walter Benning, your previous Region 3 editor, who was injured in a home accident. We hope Walt can get birding again, especially before the shorebirds pass through Montezuma.

Abbreviations: CC-Christmas Count; Co-County; ECC-Elmira Christmas Count; ICC-Ithaca Christmas Count; Cay-Cayuga; L-Lake; max-maximum; MNWR-Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge; Sen-Seneca; WFC-Waterfowl Count (14 Jan.).

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LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: notably absent on Cay L all winter (J. Confer); max number reported was five Watkins Glen 27 Dec with an additional report from Keuka L. Pied-billed Grebe: above normal in Geneva; five ICC. Horned Grebe: an incredible 116 on WFC at Keuka L; 20 ICC, previous high was two; five ECC, first report ever; 36 Watkins Glen 25 Dec. Red-necked Grebe: three Myers Point 19 Feb; one Hammondsport seen in Jan and Feb. Great Blue Heron: never before absent ECC; wintered thru in Ithaca, Watkins Glen and Penn Yan. Tundra Swan: present thru Keuka L; 25 Seneca Falls 20 Feb; three Ithaca reports; Geneva mid-Feb. Snow Goose: occasional thru Ithaca; 2,500 MNWR 27 Feb. Canada Goose: the usual thousands wintering around Cay L; big flight days occurred between 15 Feb and 22 Feb in our region. Wood Duck: two Ithaca WFC; one Watkins Glen Dec. Green-winged Teal: two reports Ithaca Dec and Jan. Am. Black Duck: 1,395 total for Ithaca, Penn Yan and Elmira WFC. No. Pintail: 20 Queen Catherine Marsh 20 Feb; scattered reports in Ithaca; 2,000 MNWR 24 Feb. Gadwall: max 68 Ithaca WFC. Am. Wigeon: 16 Ithaca WFC; present thru Sen L. Canvasback: 574 Ithaca and Penn Yan WFCs. Redhead: 542 ICC, new high; 4,517 Ithaca WFC; 2,214 Penn Yan WFC. Ring-necked Duck: small numbers present on Cay, Sen and Keuka Ls. Greater Scaup: first ever ECC; 80 Watkins Glen 8 Feb; present thru Cay L. Lesser Scaup: 107 ICC. Oldsquaw: four Ithaca 26 Jan only report. White-winged Scoter: two Sheldrake 29 Jan; four Watkins Glen Feb; small numbers Keuka L in Jan and Feb. Com. Goldeneye: 234 Ithaca WFC; 30 Elmira 18 Jan. Hooded Merganser: most numerous merganser on Penn Yan WFC. Com. Merganser: 115 ICC new high; 21 ECC. Red-breasted Merganser: scarce thru in all areas. Ruddy Duck: present Ithaca only in Dec.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: one Elmira 18 Feb-early. Bald Eagle: an imm Watkins Glen area on the Schuyler CC. No. Harrier: fairly regular in Tompkins, Schuyler Co. but scarce in other areas. Sharp-shinned Hawk: eight ICC, new high. Cooper's Hawk: generally

considered more conspicuous than Sharp-shinned. No. Goshawk: one Ithaca 28 Jan. Red-shouldered Hawk: one Ithaca 19 Jan. Red-tailed Hawk: 49 ICC; two ECC, lowest count ever. Rough-legged Hawk: 19 ICC, new high; present but in small numbers in all other areas. Merlin: one 2 Jan just outside ECC circle. Ring-necked Pheasant: scarce except in Phelps and Seneca Falls areas where as many as 11 were seen at one time. Wild Turkey: 29 ICC, new high; doing well all over. Am. Coot: 62 Schuyler CC, new high; 312 Penn Yan WFC; good numbers Cay L. Killdeer: two ICC. Am. Woodcock: two Ithaca area during Feb warm spell, one eventually found dying, the other's fate unknown. Bonaparte's Gull: found on Sen L in both Geneva and Watkins Glen in Dec. Iceland Gull: one ICC; one Watkins Glen 9 Feb. Glaucous Gull: one Van Cleef L Seneca Falls 22 Dec; two ICC. Great Black-backed Gull: 35 ICC, new high.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: E. Screech-Owl: 11 ICC, new high; doing well in reporting areas. Great Horned Owl: returned to last year's nest in both Phelps and near Camp Ditter; good numbers on CCs. Barred Owl: one thru Geneva; one east of MNWR 30 Jan. Short-eared Owl: Ithaca area, Penn Yan and Geneva but in small numbers. Belted Kingfisher: ten ICC, new high; two ECC, new low. Red-headed Woodpecker: one Tompkins Co 7 Feb. Red-bellied Woodpecker: 27 ICC; 6 Schuyler CC; various locations Elmira thru. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: wintered thru in Ithaca; Dec thru Jan Elmira feeder. Downy Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker: populations seem to be stable. No. Flicker: wintered thru Ithaca, Watkins Glen. Pileated Woodpecker: 18 ICC, new high.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: an up year; 341 ICC; 300 Watkins Glen 1 Jan; 100 Elmira 15 Jan. Blue Jay: low numbers on both field and feeder observations. Fish Crow: two ICC. Tufted Titmouse: increasing in Schuyler Co. 28 CC. Red-breasted Nuthatch: regular but not a large incursion year. White-breasted Nuthatch: 214 ICC; 31 Schuyler CC. Carolina Wren: regular Queen Catherine Marsh: three singing at once, five in one day Ithaca; additional report from Elmira. Winter Wren: one sighting ECC only report. Golden-crowned Kinglet: 14 ICC; 12 ECC; found regularly in both areas thru. Ruby-crowned Kinglet: one ICC. E. Bluebird: regular in Watkins Glen thru with a max of ten 21 Jan; 11 wintering Lodi Point; small flock Elmira early Feb. **VARIED THRUSH:** one North Lansing 22 Jan (C. Smith *et al.*) last sighting unknown. Am. Robin: wintered thru with flocks of 100 in Watkins Glen and Penn Yan; 71 ICC. No. Mockingbird: doing extremely well in Ithaca and Elmira; 58 ICC, new high. Water Pipit: Cornell Campus 12 Feb. Cedar Waxwing: irregular thru. No. Shrike: one Waterloo area 17 Dec; four ICC.

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: two Phelps area 16 Feb. Com. Yellow-throat: Queen Catherine Marsh 27 Feb.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: No. Cardinal: 418 ICC, new high; 15 max at Pine City feeder. Am. Tree Sparrow: more than usual from reporting areas mostly staying in fields and no great numbers at feeders; flocks of hundreds in Phelps and Elmira. **CHIPPING SPARROW:** ICC. Field Sparrow: several seen Queen Catherine Marsh thru; four ICC and ECC. Fox Sparrow: one Elmira at feeder in Dec and Jan. Song Sparrow: 103 ICC, new high mostly at Cass Park; 13 Schuyler CC. Swamp Sparrow: two Schuyler CC; three ICC. White-throated Sparrow: numbers up from previous years' counts; 139 ICC; 75 Schuyler CC. White-crowned Sparrow: wintered thru in Elmira and Phelps. Lapland Longspur: one Schuyler CC; two reports Ithaca late Jan. Snow Bunting: a good year for sightings; flocks varied from a few to 2,000-3,000 in Ithaca area in Jan; two perched on utility wires in Phelps; 150 Elmira 15 Jan. Red-winged Blackbird: 22 Schuyler CC; scarce otherwise. E. Meadowlark: a few birds in Ithaca, Elmira, and Penn Yan. Rusty Blackbird: two Elmira briefly visiting feeder during Dec snow squall; Ithaca 18 Feb. Com. Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbird: very scarce until late Feb. Purple Finch: regular Queen Catherine Marsh thru. Com. Redpoll: only one bird at feeder at Elmira in Feb. Pine Siskin: six ICC, last report. Am. Goldfinch: flock of 75-100 Seneca Falls Jan; numbers down otherwise. Evening Grosbeak: present but in reduced numbers. House Sparrow: ubiquitous and multitudinous.

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