

REGION 4 - SUSQUEHANNA

HARRIET MARSI

December in Region 4 started out in normal fashion with temperatures in the high 20's and low 30's. Precipitation was light until 11 thru 14 December when 4.2" of rain deluged area streams and rivers, saturating ground not yet frozen, filling ponds, swales and low spots. Then, before water levels were able to recede, the mercury plummeted. For the next two weeks ICE was the name of the game as the area endured one of the coldest Decembers on record. Driveways, parking lots, even lawns became unplanned skating rinks. On the night of 24 December winds from the North Pole measuring 15 to 25 mph carried Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, etc. along "like the down of a thistle." Temperatures on 25 December ranged from 4° to -2°. Birders whose Christmas Count fell early in the period took serious precautions against frostbite.

Those whose Christmas Count dates fell early in January were more fortunate. The record cold retreated with the Old Year, allowing warmer air from the southwest to welcome in the New. January temperatures settled in the twenties with a cold snap on the 11th and 12th and another trip to the deep freeze on 21 January (9° high, -9° low). The January thaw arrived in time to bring temperatures during the last week of the month into the mid-thirties and higher. However, the accumulated 1.59" of precipitation never really covered the ground. The trend toward normalcy continued until 10 February when winds aloft suddenly did an about face and for two weeks the area enjoyed a delightful preview of spring. The usual cold Arctic air was replaced by warm moist breezes from the Gulf, a watery warmth that produced some rain but, more significantly, melted all the ice that had been locked in the ground since December. Once more area rivers and streams rose to flood levels, which eventually crested and subsided as the temperatures continued to mount. On 23 February a record 56° and on 24 February a record 63° served as a fitting finale to this vernal interlude. On 25 February the temperatures dropped 15 degrees in one hour. A cold sleet-laden front moved sluggishly in. Traveler's advisories were issued. Despite large amounts of snow all around and a storm watch which continued to month's end, Region 4 consistently got off more easily than others. On 29 February unmarried ladies chasing unattached males had only to contend with a bit of ice underfoot.

Bird behavior was predictable. The December ice concentrated water birds on large reservoirs or open river waters. Loitering migrants, caught off guard, were sizeably represented on Christmas Counts. Most didn't make it through January. Some southerners struggling to establish a northern foothold suffered setbacks. Mockingbird reports petered out as the period advanced and there were only two reports of Carolina Wrens after January. Grouse and turkey reports were low. The open fields provided protective coloring but the very wet spring may also have curtailed successful nesting. Feeder reports were disappointing. A poor year for winter finches, there were only a few reports of Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins. Evening Grosbeaks in small flocks put in intermittent appearances. Sparrows preferred to forage in the open fields.

Hawks on the other hand showed up in goodly numbers. One reporter - a farmer - attributed this to a high population of meadow voles. "All winter I have seen them as I spread manure. Last week (Feb) when the snow melted I cleared flood-strewn debris from a meadow and under the debris piles were scores of voles." (DM). In any event, one Cooper's Hawk lunched regularly Jan and Feb on Binghamton Courthouse Rock Doves. An observer (PM) commented, "He usually shows up in the late morning or mid-afternoon . . . approaches from the wooded hills on Binghamton's south side, heads straight down Exchange St., takes a left at Hawley, courses over the jailhouse and makes a surprise attack flying over the Courthouse Dome." Pigeon pandemonium!! The February warmth brought in many reports of early returns of such species as Canada Geese, Red-wings, Common Grackles and American Robins.

There were three rarities during the period. A Boreal Chickadee spent the winter at a suet feeder in Owego (BC), a Varied Thrush was reported in Delaware-Otsego area (CWr), and a Magnolia Warbler in Endwell 15-18 Dec (JS).

Observers: C/J Baldwin, H. Barnes, J/R Barnes, W. Bartlett, J. Becker, D/J Bell, L. Bemont, R. Bennett, L. Bingley, B. Bozdos, R. Breidinger, W. Breidinger, D. Burgin, F. Burnes, L. Carey, S. Carey, A. Carpenter, J. Chase, L/M Clark, B. Cormier, C. Covey, K. Crane, R. Daigle, A/M Davis, J. Davis, L. Dean, J. Dillon, M. Dobinsky, J. Doig, S. Dorber, J. Doxstader, G. Dropp, R. Eckhardt, A. Este, E/P Getkin, S. Hartman, H. Hoffman, E/G Holway, M. Horak, C. Howard, C. Hurtgam, R/R Ilse, P. Keith, H. Kingery, E/G Kirch, J. Koenig, M. Lafayette, C/J Lehman, F. Linaberry, E. Longton, D. Lowe, H. Marsi, R. Marsi, A. Mason, W. Maxim, L. McDowell, S. McPherson, E. Mead, D. Messineo, J. Miller, S. Miller, M. Miller, P. Miller, B. Monroe, S. Moran, M. Musci, L. Nettleton, B. New, F. O'Leary, R. Parker, P. Petokas, M/M H. Pierce, S. Paston, D. Rider, J. Robert, H. Robison, C. Ryder, J/R Saunders, H/J Schultes, J. Sedlacek, M/R Sheffield, S. Smith, K/L Stalter, S. Stamos, W. Stupke, W. Toner, G. Wade, B. Webster, D. Wheat, A. Whitaker, C. Whitcomb, G. White, C. Wilkins, B/T Wilson, K. Wilson, D. Windson, C. Wright, I. Wright, C. Yates.

Abbreviations: CBC-Chenango Bird Club; CCBC-Cortland County Bird Club; DOAS-Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society; NCBC-Naturalists Club of Broome County; TBC-Tioga Bird Club; CC after any of the above means Christmas Count; CR-Cannonsville Reservoir; OPM-Oneonta, Portlandville, Milford; PR-Pepacton Reservoir; REEC-Rogers Environmental Education Center; WPR-Whitney Point Reservoir.

LOONS-DUCKS: Horned Grebe: four reports, all Dec; two Broome Co (A/MD, RS), one Cortland Co (PP); one TBC. Great Blue Heron: eight reports; four Dec; two Broome Co (A/MD, JS), one CBCCC, one Tioga Co (RB, D/JB); three Jan; one Cortland Co (WB); two Otselic (possibly same bird) (DM); one Feb Tioga Co (RB, RE). Tundra Swan: two reports; one 18/19 Feb of three birds in a flooded field near Greene (Chu); one 20 Feb of a small flock flying north over PA/NY border, Vestal (BB, JS). Snow Goose: one report 23 Feb of small flock flying over Apalachin (PG). Canada Goose: four Dec reports, last 25 Dec Broome Co (J/RS); many Feb reports, earliest 9 Feb Binghamton (CL). Green-winged Teal: two birds seen by several 12/14 Jan near CR. Am. Black Duck: two major centers, one of approx 30 mixed in with Mallards in Susquehanna and Chenango R near Binghamton, one of over 100 at CR. Mallard: regular thru but in reduced numbers. Canvasback: two reports; one 12 Jan West Branch Delaware R (SD), one Feb Tioga Co (RB, RE). Greater Scaup: three reports: one 10 Dec WPR (RM); one 22 Jan Norwich (JL), one 28 Jan Norwich (JL). Com. Goldeneye: one Dec report; Tioga Co (RE); several Jan/Feb reports, all Susquehanna R, Tioga Co, except one 28 Jan Chenango R Norwich (JL). Com. Merganser: three Dec reports, two Broome, one Tioga Cos; several Jan/Feb reports all Broome-Tioga Cos except one of

five birds 2 Jan Wells Bridge (MD). Red-breasted Merganser: two birds, 16 Jan, Lounsberry (GK, HM).

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Osprey: two reports; one 14 thru 20 Jan Delhi (SC); one Feb Newark Valley (LD); unusual during this period. Bald Eagle: many reports Jan/Feb all from CR, PR, largest number six. No. Harrier: three Dec reports; one 17 Dec CBCCC; one 17 Dec DOASCC; one Dec Tioga Co (LBI); one Jan report, one 1 Jan TBC. Sharp-shinned Hawk: several reports thru; good numbers. Cooper's Hawk: several reports thru; good numbers. No. Goshawk: only one report; 2 Dec Apalachin (GW). Red-tailed Hawk: regular thru; one pair, Otselic "19 Feb and on, courting around nests" (DM). Rough-legged Hawk: regular thru; good numbers "maybe due to high population of meadow voles" (DM). Am. Kestrel: regular thru although on low side. Ring-necked Pheasant: four reports; two Broome Co (SD), one Chenango Co (DM), one Tioga Co (LD). Ruffed Grouse: regular thru but in low numbers - connected with heavy rains during spring nesting season? Wild Turkey: regular thru but in low numbers - see Ruffed Grouse. No. Bobwhite: one report of five 17 Dec (CBCCC). Am. Coot: one report 31 Dec Cortland Co (WB). Killdeer: one Dec report, 31 Dec (CCBCCC); several Feb reports, earliest 16 Feb, Endicott (JS). Com. Snipe: one report of one bird 15 Dec Sherburne "at a location where they breed" (BWe). Am. Woodcock: one report 17 Feb Broome Co (JDa); very early. Ring-billed Gull: last large flock 100 4 Dec Vestal (FL, HM), a few later in Dec up to 1 Jan; first sizeable spring flock 40 27 Feb WPR (RM). Herring Gull: a few flocks of 25 as late as 26 Dec (NCBCCC) and 1 Jan (TBCCC); first returnees two 20 Feb Oneonta (KW).

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Rock Dove: common thru. Mourning Dove: common thru. E. Screech-Owl: sparsely scattered thru except in Norwich and Otselic where energetic owl hunts using tapes (JL, DM) yielded very good numbers. Great Horned Owl: scattered thru, especially good numbers reported from Norwich and Otselic; see E. Screech-Owl. Snowy Owl: one Dec, found dead and turned in to REEC; one 7 Dec Gilbertsville (reported to RD); three reports of a bird near Windsor - all in Feb, probably same bird (BB, FL, RM). Barred Owl: seven reports; one 16 Dec CBCCC; two 26 Dec NCBCCC; two 18 Feb Conklin (HB); one 24 Feb and one 26 Feb, both Otselic but different birds (DM), "answered tapes." Long-eared Owl: one, first week in Jan, Otselic, "found dead by a hunter" (DM). Belted Kingfisher: sparsely scattered thru. Red-headed Woodpecker: one seen twice in Jan and once in Feb, Delhi (DBu). Red-bellied Woodpecker: several all period Tioga Co; one or two occasionally in Chenango Co; one "all period" Smyrna (A/R). Downy Woodpecker: common thru. Hairy Woodpecker: common thru. No. Flicker: one 26 Dec NCBCCC; two 1 Jan TBCCC; one all Feb Chenango Bridge (JBec); one Feb Tioga Co (D/JB, LBi). Pileated Woodpecker: two Broome Co reports, one 11 Dec (MS), one 27 Dec (RM); two Tioga Co reports, three 1 Jan TBCCC one Feb (D/JB, CY, LBi), two Chenango Co reports, one 17 Dec (CBCCC), one 25 Feb (JL).

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: "a group" 31 Dec Cortland Co (CCBCCC); a flock all period Tioga Co. Blue Jay: common thru, but fewer in Broome/Tioga Co (gypsy moth connection?). Am. Crow: common thru. Black-capped Chickadee: common thru. **BOREAL CHICKADEE:** one Jan/Feb feeding at suet Owego (BC). Tufted Titmouse: regular thru, increasing in numbers especially in Broome and Tioga Cos. Red-breasted Nuthatch: scattered thru, "seem to be more numerous in Tioga Co" (JBel). White-breasted Nuthatch: common thru. Brown Creeper: sparsely scattered thru. Carolina Wren: 11 reports; nine Dec/1 Jan in Tioga, Cortland and Broome Cos; the two "all season birds" were, surprisingly, in the northern part of the region; one Cortland was fed peanut butter plastered to the inner walls of an inverted margarine tub, hung and equipped with a makeshift landing arrangement (CW); one Chenango Co was fed shelled and ground sunflower seeds mixed with ground suet (CWr) (Carolina Wren's initials also happen to be CW). Winter Wren: one 26 Dec Broome Co (NCBCCC); one 31 Dec Cortland (WT); one 1 Jan Norwich (JL). Golden-crowned Kinglet: sparsely scattered thru. E. Bluebird: six 20 Dec Apalachin (SD).

Am. Robin: many Dec/early Jan reports, especially Broome, Chenango, Cortland and Tioga Cos; only one Jan report, Broome Co (CY); several Feb reports, earliest 17 Feb Endwell (FL). **VARIED THRUSH**: one 17 Dec DOASCC, also seen 18, 19, 20 Dec at feeder "very cold night Dec 20 - did not return" (CWr). No. Mockingbird: 13 Dec/early Jan reports mostly Broome and Tioga Cos, but also Oneonta, Chenango; one all-Jan report Otsego (HR); two "till about 20 Jan" Oneonta (IW); five Jan (no specific date) Broome Co (NCBC); one 17 Feb Broome Co (NCBC). Brown Thrasher: one Dec Tioga Co (D/JB). Cedar Waxwing: regular thru. No. Shrike: eight birds: one 3 Dec Cortland (JDox); three 17 Dec CBCCC; one Dec Tioga Co (TBC); one 20 Dec, one 17 Jan "at feeder," one 20 Jan "at feeder," all Otselic (DM). Eur. Starling: common thru; numbers markedly reduced in Broome Co; only 224 there on Christmas Count.

VIREOS-WARBLERS: MAGNOLIA WARBLER: one 15 thru 18 Dec, Endwell "eating suet and feeding on millet with Dark-eyed Juncos" (JS).

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: No. Cardinal: common thru. Rufous-sided Towhee: one 17 Dec Chenango Co (CBCCC); one 3 Jan Cortland (JC); one Dec thru 18 Jan Vestal (HM). Am. Tree Sparrow: common thru. Field Sparrow: one 17 Dec CBCCC, three 1 Jan TBCCC. Fox Sparrow: one 17 Dec CBCCC. Song Sparrow: smattering thru. White-throated Sparrow: scattered thru Broome, Chenango, Cortland and Tioga Cos. Dark-eyed Junco: common thru. Lapland Longspur: two 31 Dec CCBCCC (RD). Snow Bunting: 13 blocks reported; one Broome Co; four Chenango Co; one Cortland Co; three Delaware co; one OPM; three Tioga Co. Red-winged Blackbird: nine Dec birds, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Tioga; six Jan birds, Delaware, Tioga Cos; none in Feb till returning migrants, first 17 Feb (FL) Broome Co. E. Meadowlark: one 31 Dec CBCCC (RD). Rusty Blackbird: one flock, 26 Feb, Broome Co (JDi). Com. Grackle: two Dec reports, one Tioga (LD), one Broome Co (SP); two Jan reports, one Delaware Co (DR), one Broome Co (same as Dec bird), no further reports until 17 Feb Broome Co (FL), earliest of several. Brown-headed Cowbird: several Dec reports thru; one 30 Jan Otselic (DM); earliest of several Feb reports 17 Feb Vestal (BB, JS). No. Oriole: one Dec Tioga Co (C/JB). Pine Grosbeak: eight to ten 20 Dec "feeding on ash seeds" Otselic (DM); two 26 Dec NCBCCC; one 30 Jan Chenango Co (JL). Purple Finch: 16 17 Dec CBCCC; three 31 Dec CCBCCC, six 17 Dec DOASCC; Dec Tioga Co (C/JB); one 27 Dec Apalachin (E/PG); three 25 thru 28 Jan Delaware Co (DR); two 16 Feb Delaware Co (FB); sparse. House Finch: common thru with small numbers in Oneonta and Delhi. Com. Redpoll: one 26 Dec NCBCCC; two 17 Dec CBCCC; a few 3 Jan Cortland (JC); seven 1-4 Feb Delhi (JDoi); one Feb Tioga Co (JBel, LBi). Pine Siskin: six 1 Dec Endwell (JS); three 11 Dec Norwich (JL); Dec Tioga Co (D/JB); 30 Dec Vestal (SD); four to ten "often in Jan" Oneonta (KW), one 25 Jan (MD, KW); three to seven "almost daily" Feb Oneonta (KW); two Feb Tioga Co (JBel, LBi), 12/13 Feb NCBC. Am. Goldfinch: reported thru in all areas but with frequent comments such as "lower in number than last year" (DM). "Flocks smaller" (JL) "fewer than last year" (FL). Evening Grosbeak: present thru but in smaller flocks thinly and irregularly distributed. House Sparrow: common thru.

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