

REGION 7 – ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

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As expected, this was possibly the winter of the century for the Adirondack-Champlain Region and certainly so for the post-WW II period for which good comparative quantitative data is available. This, in spite of abysmal weather on the Christmas counts, continuing public complaints about "no birds" (meaning few willing to leave the bounty in the wilds for feeder hand-outs), and the usual winter drop in the number of active observers. The crop of Red Cedar berries and similar fare provided record numbers of robins and waxwings (the juncos are more difficult to explain), while the heavy set of seeds by birches, hemlocks, and spruces provided incentive for nesting by enormous numbers of crossbills and siskins. Commenting on the situation in the Cedar River-Indian Lake area of Hamilton County, McKinney spoke for most Adirondack observers by noting, "Hundreds of Red and White-winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins. Couldn't really make an estimate of numbers. More crossbills in three days than I've seen in 40 years of birding combined. WOW!"

Nesting crossbills and siskins are hardly thought of as yard birds, so it is indicative of the invasion that window-watchers reported Red Crossbills dismantling an old waxwing nest near Inlet to build their own in nearby spruces, and others in song-flight over a house near Elizabethtown. White-winged Crossbills brought young to a Tupper Lake yard and were in song-flight around a log cabin near Paradox. Pine Siskins were spotted gathering nesting material outside homes near Elizabethtown and Witherbee. As of the end of November, and after five full years of Atlas field work, hundreds of observers had recorded Red Crossbills in only 24 regional blocks, White-winged in just 20. By the end of February, about a dozen dedicated observers had pushed those totals to Red Crossbill in 70 blocks, White-winged in 90. Considering that multiple sightings within a single block were often involved, the breeding numbers were incredible, even with reports from only a fraction of blocks that might have had crossbills nesting.

Several observers detected differences in calls, bill size, and food preferences among nesting Red Crossbills, and with no interbreeding where they were in close proximity. At least two, and perhaps three, forms seemed involved, with the smaller-billed *Loxia curvirostra sitkensis* which favors hemlock, most widespread. For similar taxonomic puzzles over whether these might pertain to forms, races, subspecies, "emergent interspecies," or even separate full species, see the account of "Crossbill" (also *L. curvirostra*) in *The Atlas of Breeding Birds in Britain and Ireland*, p. 428.

Following the late second Indian Summer, the season began with bare ground that was quickly covered by a major storm on 6 December that piled 18" of snow over much of the region. Weather for the Christmas Bird Counts was terrible on each of the three succeeding week-ends. The 15 December Ferrisburg CBC (hereinafter FCBC) had snow and freezing rain with gusty winds at the start, although Lake Champlain remained open at 42° F, at a level of 94.96'. Plattsburgh reached a record 54° on 17 December, but by 22 December the Elizabethtown

CBC (ECBC) began with freezing rain, and some trails still had snow up to 14" deep. The following Friday it began raining heavily, and by the 29th December Saranac Lake CBC (SLCBC) the snow in the woods was down to bare ground in places, rivers swollen above their banks. Birds avoided feeders and road shoulders, while observers were confounded by problems of access. Hiking flooded trails was out, as was "walking the river," with the ice out. Canoes, snowshoes, and skis were equally useless, and cars not much better on the icy roads.

January was 3° colder than average, with just 29% of possible sunshine. The 26 inches of precipitation in lower areas was mostly light and fluffy and about average. Lake Champlain was closing over by the 13 January NYS Waterfowl Count (NYSWC). By the end of the month there were about 4½ feet of snow on the higher mountains, only a few inches less than last winter.

February temperatures were above normal and there was 31% of possible sunshine recorded. Total precipitation in the lowlands was about 11 inches. Snow depths reached about five feet on some summits, but had sunk a foot by the end of the month, thanks to a thaw on 24 February. As the following cold front pushed through, winds reached gusts of up to 75 mph on 25 February, felling trees. Champlain stood at 96.41' at the close of the period. A total of about 89 species, plus at least two subspecies, was reported, somewhat lower than the last two winters. Unfortunately, no report of the 15 December Plattsburgh CBC was received.

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LOONS-DUCKS: Two unidentified loons came down in a snowstorm 18 Dec. at Raquette L. where Browns Tract stream created an opening; one crossed the ice 20 Dec., was caught on shore, taken to still-open Seventh L. and released, while the other apparently got out of Raquette (*vide* GL). Com. Loon: max six NYSCW. Horned Grebe: max 19 FCBC. Again, Great Blue Herons lingered, with one over Tahawus in late Dec. (WC), one SLCBC, and a third at Elizabethtown 2 Jan. (GL). In spite of the PIK program and local cutbacks in corn production, an amazing 1,461 Canada Geese stayed for the FCBC, while one of three honkers on the Raquette R. 21 Jan. was chased by a Bald Eagle. Even after Whallon's Bay froze in late Jan., over 300 geese remained. Am. Black Duck: max 158 NYSCW. Mallard: max 112 NYSCW; both blacks and Mallards were found on all three CBCs and a few remained on the Boquet R. thru Feb. Three No. Pintails showed up for the SLCBC, while five No. Shovelers made count period for the FCBC at Westport. North West Bay also had pairs of Gadwalls and Canvasbacks on count day of the FCBC. White-winged Scoter: one, northern Clinton Co. 2 Dec. (MG). The NYSCW tally included two Canvasbacks, two Greater Scaups, one Lesser Scaup, 1,575 Com. Goldeneyes, 33 Buffleheads, three Hooded Mergansers, 511 Com. Mergansers, and a single Red-breasted Merganser. A few Com. Mergansers were found thru Feb. on the Boquet R., at Indian L., and Tupper L.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Rather unexpected was the Turkey Vulture flying over River Road, Salmon River, 25 Jan. (JT), and one over Owl's Head Hill near Franklin Co. Rt. 27 on 26 Jan. (*fide* JT). Bald Eagle reports included an imm. at Limekiln L. in Dec., one at Inlet 22 Dec., one imm. diving on a duck and later feeding at Tupper L. 25-26 Dec., two imm. Tupper L. 27 Dec., mature adult Inlet 7 Jan., adult Keeseville 8 Jan., one at Tupper L. chasing the goose 21 Jan., and two imm. and an adult at Tupper L. by 28 Feb.; these reports seem to involve at least six individuals (three imm., three adults). No. Harrier: one, so. Clinton Co. 11 Feb. Sharp-shinned Hawk: one ECBC, one chasing jays at an Owl's Head feeder 15 Dec., one chasing feeder birds at Tupper L. 9 Jan. thru Feb. No. Goshawk: one Cedar R. in Dec., one pursuing robins and waxwings through Red Cedars at Whallon's Bay 15 Dec., one ECBC, one perched near a Tupper L. feeder 10 Jan., one around an Inlet feeder to mid-Jan. Red-shouldered Hawk: one seen in same marshy area on Studley Hill Road at Town Line Brook, Franklin Co., 30 Jan. and 10 Feb. seemed resident (AH, JT). Red-tailed Hawk: recorded on three Christmas counts, max 7 ECBC. Rough-legged Hawk: reports from Crown Point, Essex, Owl's Head, Wadhams, and Westport as expected, but one at Tupper L. Marsh 3-6 Jan. was away from the usual haunts. Single Am. Kestrels turned up on the ECBC and on Crown Point peninsula 25 Feb. Gray Partridge: five, no. Clinton Co. 9 Dec. (MG). A pair of Ring-necked Pheasants were in the marsh at Westport Beach 15 Dec. and one visited a Tupper L. feeder 21-28 Feb. (RG, JG). Ruffed Grouse: max 14 ECBC and one visited a Tupper L. feeding station in Feb. (CD). Ring-billed Gull: only 41 FCBC was low, but one SLCBC on Mirror L. was a first for that inland count. Herring Gulls: 20 FCBC was low, but 18 SLCBC was extraordinary for a species last recorded during count period in 1953! **GLAUCOUS GULL:** adult at dump near Saranac L. 12 Dec., followed by an imm on L. Flower 17 Dec. (RH); these appear to constitute a first record for Franklin Co. and second and third records for the Adirondack Park. Great Black-backed Gull: 4 FCBC; max 17 NYSWC along Clinton and Essex Co. shorelines and the St. Regis R. in Franklin Co.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Rock Dove: max 474 SLCBC. Mourning Dove: max 73 ECBC and widely reported elsewhere, including two at Tupper L. in Feb. Two E. Screech-Owls were heard on the ECBC near Wadhams. Great Horned Owl: pair calling near Paradox by 15 Dec. A Snowy Owl was found dead at the Saranac Lake airport in Dec. (EG, RH), another reported from Ticonderoga 7 Feb. (BC). Barred Owl: two ECBC, one SLCBC; pair started courtship calling near Paradox 19 Jan. (MB). A **GREAT GRAY OWL** was seen on the Depot Road south of North Bangor 5 Feb. (DF), and there were two other possible sightings from no. Franklin Co. No. Saw-whet Owl: one ECBC responded to a tape from a known territory; calling began at Chilson 9 Feb., Paradox 22 Feb., and Tupper L. 26 Feb. Belted Kingfishers lingered at Westport to 13 Jan. and Saranac R. to 29 Jan. (RH). Downy Woodpecker: max 23 ECBC. Hairy Woodpecker: max 16 ECBC; woodpeckers courting near Paradox from 17 Feb. (MB). Two No. Flickers were noted in Dec. Pileated Woodpecker: max 8 ECBC.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Ten Horned Larks were found on the FCBC, with about that many near Westport in early Feb. (JT). Gray Jay: max three SLCBC. Blue Jay: max 251 ECBC. Am. Crow: max 400-500 Porter Road north of Thomas Hill Road near Malone 19 Jan. suggests a nearby roost (JT). Com. Raven: max eight SLCBC, and reports of pairs patrolling the highways for dead birds near Inlet, Lake Placid, Long Lake, and Speculator. Could the vultures have been exploiting the same ready supply of dead finches? Black-capped Chickadee: max 614 ECBC. Boreal Chickadee: max eight California Road off Studley Hill Road, n. Franklin Co., 4-10 Feb. (JT). Red-breasted Nuthatch: max 55 ECBC. White-breasted Nuthatch: max 24 ECBC; both species eating beechnuts and courting near Paradox 9 Dec. (MB). Brown Creeper: max 7 SLCBC, and singing began near Paradox 5 Feb. A **CAROLINA WREN** found between Elizabethtown and Westport on the ECBC was the first report since April 1981 and the first winter report in a decade (JR, CS). Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 44 ECBC. Observers were surprised to find two E. Bluebirds near Essex 1

Dec. (GR), three looking over bird houses at Moriah 29-30 Dec. (AP), and max 4 investigating another Moriah nestbox 31 Dec. (MR). What a remarkable winter for Am. Robins! The record 178 seen near Essex and Westport on the NYS side of the Ferrisburg CBC actually represented only a fifth of those found within the two-state count circle on 15 Dec.! Other reports came from Crown Point, Heart Lake, Inlet, Keene Valley, Keeseville, Owl's Head, Point au Roche, Raquette Lake, Saranac Lake, and Tupper Lake well into Feb. Bohemian Waxwing: Inlet 22 Dec. the only report of the season (GL). Cedar Waxwings were no less exciting, and even more abundant than robins, with a max 442 on the Essex Co. side of the FCBC circle, and that also only a fifth of the total for both states. Eur. Starling: max 366 FCBC.

VIREOS-WARBLEDERS: A Yellow-rumped Warbler survived on a diet of frozen spiders on a Peru porch from 23-27 Jan. (EF).

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: No. Cardinal: max seven ECBC and seven SLCBC, almost matched by six at a Ticonderoga feeder (EP). Song Sparrow: one ECBC. White-throated Sparrow: two ECBC. The numbers and wide distribution of wintering Dark-eyed Juncos were exceptional: 83 on the NYS side of FCBC (just over half the two-state total), max 223 ECBC, 31 SLCBC, plus reports of 45 near a Paradox cabin and 32 at Tupper L. thru late Jan., and seven at Indian L. into Feb. providing a general idea of regional totals. On 8 Dec. the flock at a feeder near Elizabethtown was joined by a bird matching descriptions and plates of "Pink-sided Junco" (*Junco hyemalis mearnsi*), the junco remaining through the 22 Dec. ECBC (EJ, JP). Another, initially described as an "Oregon Junco", appeared at a feeder near Inlet in Dec., then another visited the same feeder from 23 Jan. and was an "Oregon-or-Pink-sided" (GL). Another reported as "Oregon Junco" was at the edge of Rt. 99, Franklin Co. 4 Feb. (JT). Identification was based upon the Peterson guide, but written description matched account of "Pink-sided" in the Audubon Master Guide and plate somewhat erroneously labeled "Pink-sided Oregon race" in the Robbins guide. Whatever they were, there were four of them, in three different counties, this winter. Lapland Longspur: four, no. Clinton Co. 5 Jan. (MG). Although no Snow Buntings were encountered on the Christmas counts, a max 1,000 were at Essex 9 Jan. (GR), 100 near Hogsburg 30 Jan. (HW), and smaller numbers near Ft. Covington, Owl's Head, Ticonderoga, Wadhams, and Westport. Red-winged Blackbird: 3 FCBC provided the only report until late Feb. A Rusty Blackbird on the SLCBC was a first for regional counts. An adult male **BREWER'S BLACKBIRD** frequented a feeder on the Whallon's Bay Road, Essex, from 6-14 Dec. (J & RP, also GC, EJ, JP). The bird came in on the morning of 6 Dec. as one major storm ended, fed largely on whole sunflower seeds, struck a window several days later, and was last seen alive in weakened condition late in the afternoon 14 Dec. just before another storm with sleet and freezing rain arrived. The bird made the FCBC "count period," but failed to appear on "count day" 15 Dec. On 16 Dec. a cat brought in parts of the blackbird. This constitutes the first regional and Adirondack Park record. Com. Grackle: New Russia feeder to 11 Dec. (WT), one ECBC. Brown-headed Cowbird: three SLCBC. Pine Grosbeak: five SLCBC. Purple Finch: max 218 SLCBC. House Finch: max 222 FCBC, with other reports from Essex, Inlet, Saranac L. and Westport indicating both the numerical and geographical expansion of the past decade. Red Crossbill: max 36 ECBC, but some flocks of a hundred or more crossbills undoubtedly included this species; nest-building by Feb. White-winged Crossbill: max 303 SLCBC (highest total ever for the 29 counts since 1947, in spite of adverse conditions), singing and courtship flights from early Dec., with a fourth Confirmed Atlas record provided by a family group of male, female, and three newly-fledged juveniles feeding on spruce cones at Tupper L. on 4 Feb. (CD). Pine Siskin: max 113 SLCBC, singing from early Dec., gathering nesting material and engaging in chases by Feb. Am. Goldfinch: max 247 ECBC, flocks in birches and hemlocks throughout the region, but scarce at feeders. Evening Grosbeak: max 740 ECBC, with 175 at a Paradox area feeder 24 Jan. (MB), and 300 at a Tupper L. feeder 14 Feb. (CD). House Sparrow: Max 127 ECBC.

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