

REGION 8 – HUDSON-MOHAWK

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Although through a weatherman's eye December and January have been described as "boring," and February as worse, winters such as the one just passed serve as a "crystal ball" for birders with one eye on the future. How long ago was it when the first N. Cardinal or N. Mockingbird appeared on an area Christmas Bird Count? Or, when was it that White-throated Sparrows began to vastly outnumber Song Sparrows on the upstate counts? Without going back over the old weather records, I suspect that mild winters led into those evolutions. Well, "boring" was just the term used to describe this winter in the newsletter of the Amer. Meteorological Society. December was remarkably warm, including a record high shirt-sleeve temperature of 75° F. on the Troy Christmas Count day, 29 Dec. Early December was almost as mild. Open water prevailed through much of the area. In fact, a lone Mallard lingered on an opening in Jenny Lake in northern Saratoga Co. at least until 23 Dec. In other winters, the Hudson River would have been frozen by the second week of December. January turned out to be more nearly normal. There were no big storms as a relentless "Alberta Clipper" poured cold air out of Canada, displacing storms to our south and east. February followed with a few light snows early in the month, then a big warm-up and rains later. The stage was set for some interesting trend setting individuals to foretell the future of their species. Hence may we dare read more than what first meets the eye in perusing the reports that follow? What can be said about the 50,000 plus Am. Robins flocking to a Cocksackie roost through January, or about the high numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers on the Catskill CBC? Surely the open water can account for the high numbers and variety of waterfowl on the Christmas counts. But even when the water threatened to freeze completely, a Great Blue Heron held tenaciously to a small opening at the Ft. Plain waste water treatment plant through the worst of the winter. And flocks of Canada Geese took to landing on the ice at Tomhannock Reservoir and the Hudson River to spend the nights between their daytime forays to snow-free cornfields nearby.

Other more noticeable population trends emerge from the records submitted this season. Of course, the Com. Raven continues to expand its range. Three incursion directions are evident, from the north – the Johnstown birds, from the east – Poestenkill area reports, and a leapfrog group from either of those populations in the Round Top, Catskill Mts. Carolina Wren seems to have ventured out of its tenuous foothold in the Hudson Valley to take up winter residence in more rugged climatic areas of Chatham and Palmer's Ravine, Montgomery Co. Finally, there's lots of room for speculation regarding the Red-bellied Woodpecker's showing in Ft. Plain, Montgomery Co. Could those three birds represent a pioneer group from the lake plain stock on the verge of meeting the coastal population somewhere in the Hudson-Mohawk Valley? The nearest known Hudson Valley birds were found on the Catskill CBC, about one hundred miles to the south.

Rarities for the season include: Blue-winged Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Merlin,

Thayer's Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Fish Crow, Marsh Wren, Wilson's Warbler, and Rufous-sided Towhee, "spotted" race.

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Abbreviations used here are: Cats-Catskill, Greene Co.; Cox-Coxsackie, Greene Co.; Chat-Chatham, Columbia Co.; HR-Hudson River; MR-Mohawk River; Schen-Schenectady, Schen. Co.; SRens-Southern Rensselaer, and of course, CBC-Christmas Bird Count.

One hundred twenty species were reported this season with most of them coming from the following CBC's:

Count Name	Date	Species Total
Schenectady	Dec. 15	60
Chatham	Dec. 15	61
Catskill-Coxsackie	Dec. 20	79
So. Rensselaer	Dec. 22	60
Ft. Plain	Dec. 27	43
Troy	Dec. 29	69
Johnstown-Gloversville	Dec. 30	44

LOONS-DUCKS: Red-throated Loon: one grounded in a 5 Dec. ice-storm near W. Sand L., Rensselaer Co. released on open water the next day. Another less fortunate had ingested a tangled wad of monofilament fishing line and was found near starvation on 7 Jan. near Guiderland. It died shortly after. Com. Loon: one Cats CBC (new to count); one Waterford 9 Jan. Horned Grebe: one SRens CBC. Great Blue Heron: one each Chat & Cats CBC; two Troy CBC; one thru Ft. Plain but missed there on CBC day. Mute Swan: two thru 13 Jan. at Embough Bay, HR, Greene Co. Snow Goose: three Amsterdam 23 Dec.; 117 Troy CBC; one Hoosic R. 22-24 Jan. Brant: 15 Dec. Johnsonville, near Hoosic R. Canada Goose: several flocks still flying south in Dec. and Jan.; 4833 Chat CBC; 1550 Cats CBC; 2000+ Tomhannock Res. 26 Jan; 150 thru HR at N. Baltimore. **WOOD DUCK:** one Cats CBC. Am. Black Duck: 342 Cats CBC; 763 Troy CBC; numerous other reports thru. Mallard: 72 Amsterdam thru; 525 Cats CBC; 871 Troy CBC. No. Pintail: 28 Cats CBC; one Amsterdam STP 13 Jan. **BLUE-WINGED TEAL:** 7 Cats CBC (CK) all in one flock on a small pond; another found on the Troy CBC. No. Shoveler: one Coeymans 4 Jan. Gadwall: the 23 reported on the Cats CBC came from two groups, Tom Palmer's group had 21 in a shallow pond about ten miles from the HR, and the other two were found in another pond nearby; six Troy CBC; one Embough 24 Feb. Am. Wigeon: five Cats CBC; two Troy CBC. **EURASIAN WIGEON:** one drake on Tomhannock Res. was found on the Troy CBC count day and remained around for the next five days (W. Gorman). Canvasback: one Chat CBC. Redhead: five Embough 26 Jan. Ring-necked Duck: one each Chat and Cats CBC; plus six Troy CBC. Greater Scaup: one Chat CBC. Lesser Scaup: one each on the SRens and Johnstown CBC; two MR at Cohoes 13 Jan. Oldsquaw: one 20 Jan. MR at Crescent. Black Scoter: HR at Castleton 2 Dec. and 25 Dec. (J. Cook). Com. Goldeneye: 39 each on the Cats and Troy CBC's. Bufflehead: one Troy CBC. Hooded Merganser: two Troy CBC; one Stillwater 16 Feb. and ten Embough 24 Feb. Com. Merganser: several reports from CBC's with max. being 214 on the Troy CBC. **RED-BREASTED MERGANSER:** the one on the Schen CBC was the second record of this species in the count history, the previous record was in 1931; another was found on the Troy CBC. Ruddy Duck: 20 Embough early Dec.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Bald Eagle: one imm Cats CBC; also adults seen along the HR at the Embough 13 Jan. Halfmoon 14 Feb., and Cohoes 18 Feb. The latter two dates probably

represent the same bird. No. Harrier: 11 Cox for the Cats CBC; 14 other reports from CBC's. Sharp-shinned Hawk: 26 reports mostly of individuals hanging around feeders; max four Cats CBC. Cooper's Hawk: six reports including two feeder birds. No. Goshawk: five reports. Red-tailed Hawk: max 51 Cats CBC followed by 48 Troy CBC: seen in courtship flight 23 Feb. (TP). Rough-legged Hawk: very low numbers; only two Cats CBC; max nine on Johnstown CBC and Cox Flats 10 Feb. Am. Kestrel: also very low; max 14 Cats CBC. **MERLIN**: second year that one has been found for the CBC's, this one on SRens CBC by M. Gruett. Ring-necked Pheasant: only three region-wide reports for the season. Ruffed Grouse: "fairly common" (TP); max 11 Johnstown CBC. Wild Turkey: widespread and increasing; max 50 Cats 13 Jan. Killdeer and Am. Woodcock: both returned on the warm front of 24 Feb. **THAYER'S GULL**: one first-year bird at Colonie Landfill from Troy CBC day intermittently thru mid-Feb. (ST, KA). Iceland Gull: Colonie, Troy CBC. **LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL**: four distinctly marked individuals at various locations including one Troy CBC (DG), two Colonie 5 Jan., and one Waterford same day (BL); another poss. Niskayuna 29 Dec., plus one more at Coxsackie 13 Jan. (DG). Glaucous Gull: two Troy CBC gave that count a clean sweep on gulls for the day. Great Black-backed Gull: max 89 Troy CBC.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS. E. Screech-Owl: mild weather might have contributed to more owling by CBC parties; max seven on both Cats and Chat. CBCs, followed by six on Troy CBC and five on SRens. Great Horned Owl: same here, total of 17 on five CBCs led by five on the Cats CBC; territorial in New Baltimore 22 Dec. Barred Owl: only reports are from Johnstown CBC (one) and Chatham. Long-eared Owl: at least three returned to last year's roost in Athens, one in time for the Cats CBC; two were found again in Princetown by M. Crevier on 18 Jan.; they were calling there on 18 Feb. Short-eared Owl: the Coxsackie roost has apparently dwindled with only one found for the Cats CBC. Let's hope that this is only a weather adjustment. No. Saw-whet Owl: several calling birds reported in widely scattered locations thru the period; two Troy CBC; also, Palenville, Cornwallville, E. Greenbush, and Johnstown. Red-headed Woodpecker: two Cats CBC. Red-bellied Woodpecker: three Ft. Plain CBC; one Cats CBC. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: five Cats CBC; one Claverack 4 Jan. Downy Woodpecker: max 91 SRens CBC; absent from Jenny L. thru. Hairy Woodpecker: max 22 SRens CBC. No. Flicker: were still migrating south on the Cats CBC day when a high of 63 were counted.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLING: Horned Lark: snowless fields made finding these birds very difficult; max an about normal 432 for Cats CBC; only two for Schen CBC. Blue Jay: high on all counts; also still in migration during some CBCs; max 395 SRens CBC. Am. Crow: a noisy downtown roost in Schenectady led to numerous complaints from the residents and gave the Schen CBC a whopping count of 1,608 compared to a 530 for the cornbelt Cats CBC count. Tufted Titmouse: max 74 Cats CBC; min 17 Troy CBC. Red-breasted Nuthatch: "poorest showing in 14 years of banding at Jenny Lake" (RY); max 26 Johnstown CBC; min one Cats CBC. White-breasted Nuthatch: max 95 Cats CBC; min 24 Johnstown CBC. Brown Creeper: many reports thru, but the max of 14 on the Cats CBC is not consistent with other high numbers of "half-hardies" this year. Carolina Wren: eight reports including one from Chatham, Coxsackie, Brunswick, Amsterdam, and two from Schenectady. Winter Wren: four each, Cats and Schen CBC, several other scattered reports. **MARSH WREN**: one each Cats CBC (BB & GS) and Troy CBC (DG & WL), a new addition to the area CBC composite list. Ruby-crowned Kinglet: one each for the Cats, Schen, and Troy CBCs. E. Bluebird: max 19 Cats CBC followed by nine on the Troy count. Hermit Thrush: somewhat low when compared to other mild years; max three Cats CBC; missing from most other counts. Am. Robin: more than 1000 on Chat CBC with high numbers on other counts; the big news was the establishment of a major roost near Athens, Greene Co. Birds pouring in from all points of the compass at dusk could only be estimated, but numbers were conservatively put at 50,000 plus! Also enticing were the mysterious call notes heard from the swarm hurrying to roost. Who knows what interesting vagrant might

have been drawn into the flock? Gray Catbird: two Schen and one Chat CBCs. No. Mockingbird: fairly consistent with 28 on the SRens CBC and 27 each on the Schen and Troy CBCs. Brown Thrasher: one at a Troy feeder late Jan.; one also at Saratoga Spa 4 Feb. No. Shrike: only three reports – one each Ft. Plain and Johnstown CBCs; one Coxsackie 8 and 10 Feb. Eur. Starling: SRens CBC wins with 12,197 counted. Lucky them! Most of those were at the downtown Albany roost.

VIREOS-WARBLES: Yellow-rumped Warbler: 64 on the Cats CBC was not only high for the count, but consisted of the only report for the region. Palm Warbler: reported from both Schen and Albany on 13 Dec. Com. Yellowthroat: two Cats CBC and one Schen CBC. **WILSON'S WARBLER:** one male seen well at the start of the SRens CBC day by M. Kuhrt and Paul Conner.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: No. Cardinal: not especially feeder conscious, preferring the abundant natural food available this season; max count was 134 on the Schen CBC, min 11 Johnstown CBC. Rufous-sided Towhee: one each on the Schen and Cats CBCs; most interesting, however, was the male Rufous-sided Towhee of the "spotted" race at Cris Ketcham's feeder in Greenville, Greene Co. The bird was very shy at first but eventually ventured out into full view. The bird first appeared in late Dec. and remained thru Feb. (CD, DG). Field Sparrow: three each Schen and Cats CBCs. Fox Sparrow: one Troy CBC. Song Sparrow: max 43 Cats CBC. Swamp Sparrow: 11 reports, most from CBCs. White-throated Sparrow: max 289 Cats CBC, followed by 103 on the Schen CBC. White-crowned Sparrow: one thru, Amsterdam (TP). Lapland Longspur: only three reported, all from Cats CBC. Snow Bunting: also scarce; one CBC bird from Cats. E. Meadowlark: only report is of six way out in Ft. Plain on the CBC; curiously absent from other favored wintering areas. Rusty Blackbird: one SRens CBC. Com. Grackle: two each from Cats and SRens CBC; large flocks shortly after the count period. Purple Finch: generally scarcer to the north, increasing to the south; max 132 Cats CBC with 30 on the Troy and Schen CBCs. House Finch: still increasing in some areas; numbers decrease northward; max 518 Cats CBC; for the second winter a noticeable trend to the more wooded countryside in Greene Co. with fairly large flocks being seen in hedgerows far removed from houses (DG). A female captured in Schenectady on 20 Jan. was banded there on 8 Dec. 1973, making her at least 11 years, 8 months old, which may represent a new North American age record for the species. Red Crossbill: large flocks feasted on the abundant spruce cones in no. Saratoga and Fulton Cos. Territorial males soon led to confirmed breeding in several locations. Other numerous reports of displaying birds led to nothing as the birds moved on, taking their domestic intentions with them. At least three nestings have been confirmed. White-winged Crossbill: similar but on a smaller scale than the preceding. Most reports were from the Lake Desolation and Johnstown areas. Pine Siskin: abundant to the north; generally absent to the south; ignoring thistle seed in favor of the superabundant natural food crop (TP). Evening Grosbeak: scarce away from the conifers, and to the relief of some feeder operators, preferred the natural foods to handout sunflower seeds. House Sparrow: seem to be holding their own against the House Finch, alas.

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(Eds. note: We welcome the return of Dick Guthrie as Region 8 editor. He stepped into the breach at the last moment. Thanks.)