

## REGION 4 – SUSQUEHANNA

JAY G. LEHMAN

In contrast to the mild November, December was colder than normal in Binghamton, with at least fourteen days of below-normal mean temperatures and more snow than last year. The coldest day was 26 Dec with a mean temperature of 4°, 19° below normal, and prompted the weatherman to opine that December had been as cold as a typical January. The cold and snow continued through January but were interrupted by two mild periods. The first was a brisk spring-like Sunday, 12 Jan, with a mean temperature 16° above the norm of 21. The second was a six-day stretch of above-average temperatures in mid-month. These mild periods conveniently came during the waterfowl count period, but were a mixed blessing. They melted all the snow for non-skiers who like to be reminded of spring in mid-winter but surrounded the coldest weather of the season and generated an outbreak of flu and colds. More cold and snow followed, with twelve inches falling at Binghamton from 25 to 27 Jan, and continued through February. By the end of February the season was colder and had fourteen inches more snow than last year. Who's complaining? The ground hog again predicted an early spring, and we might yet catch a glimpse of Halley's Comet!

The 12 species of ducks and geese is the second longest list for this period in eight years. Unusual species are Snow Goose, Northern Pintail, American Wigeon, Greater Scaup, and Bufflehead. Christmas Bird Count totals were above average for Black Duck, Mallard, and Common Merganser but low for Common Goldeneye except at Cortland. Canada Geese flying northeast at Norwich in mid-January apparently were confused by the thaw. The diversity of waterfowl is partially due to the efforts of eagle counters; however, Bald Eagle numbers are about average for the past five years. Other raptors were more common. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks seem to be increasing due to increased food (birds) at feeders. Mildred Clark saw a "Sharpie" take a Mourning Dove and Starling in Delhi, while Kathryn Wilson observed one take a Blue Jay and devour it in full view in Oneonta. Bob Miller reported that a Cooper's Hawk hit his feeder in Maryland every two to three days in December. Above average Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawk reports in the south near Binghamton-Owego, and the rare **GOLDEN EAGLE** in Vestal Center on 23 Dec (JD) were probably due to a high rodent population there. However, Dave Messineo found rodents scarce and hawks few in South Otselic. Tantalizing reports of Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks were received but are not included, because they are so rare here in the winter that verifying details and confirmation are required.

The heavy, lasting snow cover reduced American Kestrel numbers, and concentrated Wild Turkeys, Horned Larks, and Snow Buntings, and an unusual Lapland Longspur to visible manure spreads. Two female Northern Bobwhites at Johnson City on 27 Feb probably represent hunt club release survivors, first seen as a flock of five in November. A late February Common Snipe at Greene probably is an early migrant. Partially open fresh water for the Cortland Christmas Count yielded a high count of Herring Gulls and our second winter record ever for **GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL**, three no less. Proximity to Lake Ontario may

also have been a factor. The usual one or two Snowy Owls were reported. A Northern Saw-whet Owl, the third report in eight years, was found in a Vestal parking lot on 24 Jan by Harriet and Rick Marsi, sent to a rehabilitator, fed, and released about a month later. Hope it survived. This may be the bird suspected of breeding in 1985. Red-bellied Woodpeckers continue to increase with the usual high count from the south as well as an equal number reported this year from the north in Sherburne. An adult Yellow-bellied Sapsucker photographed in Norwich from mid-December to mid-February is unusual; most prior winter records are from Broome County. Northern Flicker numbers were the lowest in the past four years.

Mildred Clark reported that Blue Jays were fewer than usual in Delhi, and the second lowest total in eight winters confirms this. However, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creeper, and Golden-crowned Kinglet were present in average to above-average numbers. Carolina Wrens again were reported only in the south. A veritable explosion of Tufted Titmice occurred with the highest number in eight years, two times higher than the previous maxima of 1983 and 1985, with record or near record highs on all Christmas Bird Counts. The Eastern Bluebird at Vestal on 19 Feb are fewer reported than usual. Robins ate Mountain Ash berries in Endwell, while Northern Mockingbirds ate barberries in Oneonta in December and hawthorne berries in Johnson City in February. This food source undoubtedly contributed to their average to above-average numbers. Why then were Cedar Waxwings reported in the lowest numbers in eight years? Perhaps they responded to the poor wild food crop. Northern Shrike reports were below average, but larger numbers penetrated into the southern part of the region than in recent years. They were reported by Rita Pantle (*vide* Rick Marsi) to be hunting House Sparrows roosting in multiflora rose tangles.

The most remarkable bird of the season was a **BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** at Betty Kaminsky's feeder in Endwell from two weeks before Thanksgiving until the snowstorm of 14 February. It fed with Cardinals and Chickadees on oil sunflower seeds and peanut hearts in a large redwood bucket but is suspected of supplementing its suet diet with bark insects and those found in the seeds. Margaret Layton, suspecting a Junco, went to see it but confirmed it as "deep blue, beautiful when the sun hit it and the small white [spot] on the wings." An **EASTERN PHOEBE**, the second winter report in the past eight years, also appeared at this feeding station through early February!

Northern Cardinals were more common, started singing earlier, mid-January in Norwich, and also fed young late there in the fall. Is this behavior characteristic of a species expanding its range? House Finch is also expanding its range, and they too started singing in early February in Norwich. Sparrows were well represented with the second highest species list in eight winters. American Tree Sparrow totals were the highest in eight seasons, Dark-eyed Juncos were more common than normal, and an injured Fox Sparrow at Tioga in February is an uncommon find. The Rusty Blackbird on the Sherburne Christmas Bird Count may seem rare here but has been reported in half of the last eight winters.

It was as good a winter finch year as was expected from the indications of

late fall. There were fewer crossbills than last year. Pine Grosbeak reports were the second highest in eight years, and they penetrated into the southern tier, where Harriet Marsi considers it a special treat to have thirteen all season. American Goldfinches, Pine Siskins, and Common Redpolls were more common, but Purple Finch numbers were low. Despite the heavy fall migration of Evening Grosbeaks, the winter population was lower than expected, because they continued into South Carolina. A contributing factor was undoubtedly the poor wild food crop, caused by the low production cycle with last winter's abundance.

The species list of 90 is two higher than the previous eight-year high of 88 in 1984. Golden Eagle, Great Black-backed Gull, Eastern Phoebe, and Black-throated Blue Warbler are rarities. Due to the large number of observers in the field despite the cold weather, most of the high reports are from the Christmas Counts, held on 21, 28, and 29 December and 1 January in Oneonta, Binghamton, Sherburne, Cortland, and Owego (Tioga), respectively. Counts in this season's report are compared to those from the past eight years for perspective. They may not be so exceptional when compared to a longer span of years.

Observers: Judy Bell, Les Bemont, Kelly Belton, Bruce Bozdos, Naturalists Club of Broome County, Sally Carey, Chenango Bird Club, Mildred Clark, Cortland County Bird Club, Chad Covey, Mary Dahn, Anna & Marilyn Davis, Jeff Davis, Jim Davis, Louise Dean, Lori & Bob DeCocker, Ellen Delaney, Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society, Mary Dobinsky, Sadie Dorber, Polly & Earl Gerkin, Connie Hart, Shirley Hartman, Elma Holway, Olen Houck, Betty Kaminsky, Marion Kitchen, Gail Kirch, Ken Knapp, Bill & Margaret Layton, Christine Leahy, Jay Lehman, Florence Linaberry, Joseph Longtin, Harriet Marsi, Rick Marsi, Stella McPherson, Dave Messineo, Bob Miller, Ron Milliken, Bobbie Monroe, Rita & Bob Pantle, Marilyn Paxhia, Halliday Pierce, Harriet Robinson, Maurice Russell, Nancy Sackett, Jean & Bob Saunders, Steward Stamos, Bernice Stewart, Tioga Bird Club, Bill Toner, George Wade, Kathryn Wilson, Tom & Beryl Wilson, Don Windsor, Crystal Wright, Irene Wright, David Wolman.

Abbreviations: Bing-Binghamton; BCBC-Binghamton Christmas Bird Count; NCBC-Naturalists Club of Broome County; CRes-Cannonsville Reservoir; CCBC-Cortland Christmas Bird Count; End-Endwell; Norw-Norwich; OCBC-Oneonta Christmas Bird Count; OPM-Oneonta, Portlandville, Milford; Otse-Otsego; SCBC-Sherburne Christmas Bird Count; TCBC-Tioga Christmas Bird Count; WPres-Whitney Point Reservoir; Vest-Vestal.

LOONS-DUCKS: Great Blue Heron: max five BCBC; a few scattered Jan-Feb reports. Canada Goose: max 50-75 Norw 19 Jan (JL); 45 SCBC, 2nd highest – seven SCBCs; one WPres 8 Feb (A & MD), early. Snow Goose: one WPres 8 Feb (A & MD), early, second winter report in eight years. Green-winged Teal: singles BCBC and Otse L 4 Jan (MD) and three CRes 7 Jan (HM) all very unusual in winter. Am. Black Duck: max 111 CRes 11 Jan (NCBC). Mallard: max 411 BCBC; mid-season max 389 CRes 11 Jan (NCBC). N. Pintail: one BCBC, unusual in winter. Am. Wigeon: one CRes 7 & 11 Jan, unusual in winter. Redhead: eight Otse L 28 Dec (MD) to 4 Jan, number & location unusual. Greater Scaup: female CRes 18 Jan (JL), very unusual in winter. Com. Goldeneye: max 62 CCBC; mid-season max 19 Bing 19 Jan (J & BS). Bufflehead: max six BCBC, where very unusual; scattered small numbers Jan-Feb. Hooded Merganser: max six BCBC & six CCBC; one SCBC, where very unusual. Com. Merganser: max 400 CRes 3 Dec (JD, SS); mid-season max 28 Owego to Nichols 15 Jan (HM, GK).

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Bald Eagle: max seven (4 im, 3 ad) CRes 25 Jan (RM); last ad CRes 2 Feb (RM). N. Harrier: only one TCBC. Sharp-shinned Hawk: max three BCBC; many

singles widespread, increasing. Cooper's Hawk: max three TCBC, widespread, increasing. N. Goshawk: only one Norw 26 Dec (JL). Red-tailed Hawk: max 19 BCBC and 22 TCBC, max; 12 Tioga 26 Feb (HM, BB, FL), early migrants?; high. Rough-legged Hawk: max 13 BCBC, high; five End 26 Feb (HM, BB, FL), post CBC max. Am. Kestrel: max five BCBC; scarce. Ring-necked Pheasant: max two pairs End 6 Dec; one TCBC, only CBC report, scarce. Ruffed Grouse: max seven BCBC; average counts Jan-Feb. Wild Turkey: max 100 ± Delhi 23 Feb (L & BD); flocks up to 30 widespread throughout, increasing. Ring-billed Gull: 80 ± Otse L 7 Dec to 4 Jan (MD), max and last. Herring Gull: max 83 CCBC, high; few Jan-Feb Susquehanna and Chen R post CBC.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: max 229 OCBC, high; mid-seas max 33-47 daily Delhi Jan. E. Screech Owl: single report Dec; one dead Bainbridge 28 Feb (L & BD), hit house, late-winter movement? Great Horned Owl: mid-seas max 16 BCBC. Snowy Owl: arr Homer 21 Jan (BM); last Smyrna 10 Feb (MR). Belted Kingfisher: max seven BCBC; scattered singles Jan-Feb. Red-bellied Woodpecker: max four SCBC and TCBC. Downy Woodpecker: max 64 BCBC and 59 TCBC, high; mid-seas max nine OPM 1 Feb, above average. Hairy Woodpecker: max 27 OCBC; six OPM 11 Feb (MD, KW), post CBC max; average.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: max 209 SCBC, high; post CBC max 150 Unadilla 27 Feb (MD, KW). Blue Jay: max 202 OCBC; mid-season max 35 OPM 1 Feb (MD, KW) low. Am. Crow: max 686 TCBC and 471 OCBC, high; post CBC max 150 Chen 10 Feb (DW). Black-capped Chickadee: max 513 BCBC, 449 OCBC and 487 TCBC, high; mid-season max 50 OPM 2 Jan & 11 Feb (MD, KW). Tufted Titmouse: max 48 TCBC, 40 BCBC high. Red-breasted Nuthatch: max seven TCBC, high; post CBC max three OPM 1 Feb (MD, KW). White-breasted Nuthatch: max 66 TCBC, high; post CBC max eight OPM 1 Feb (MD, KW). Brown Creeper: max 21 BCBC, high; none after 1 Jan. Carolina Wren: max three BCBC; one daily End Feb, low post CBC. Golden-crowned Kinglet: max 23 BCBC, high; last ten TCBC. Am. Robin: max 12 Vest 12 Feb (HM); scattered widespread reports of one-five. N. Mockingbird: max five BCBC; scattered singles throughout about average. Cedar Waxwing: max 19 Norw 10 Feb (JL), very low. N. Shrike: two BCBC; two TCBC; only reports.

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: only one BCBC, second in past 11 BCBCs.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: max 113 TCBC, high. Rufous-sided Towhee: last Tioga Dec (LD). Am. Tree Sparrow: max 246 TCBC and 181 OCBC, high; post CBC max 55 OPM 11 Feb (MD, KW). Chipping Sparrow: last im Chen Forks 8 Dec (A & MD). Song Sparrow: max 13 SCBC; few in Jan-Feb. Swamp Sparrow: two SCBC. White-throated Sparrow: max 32 BCBC; post CBC max three Norw 24 Jan. White-crowned Sparrow: only one Delhi 8-9 Dec daily Feb (SC). Dark-eyed Junco: max 244 TCBC and 120 OCBC, high; average numbers thereafter. Lapland Longspur: one SCBC, scarce in winter. Snow Bunting: max 350 SCBC, 100 BCBC, and 25 OCBC, high. Red-winged Blackbird: max three TCBC; last Tioga Feb. Com. Grackle: two Johnson City off & on Feb (MK), only report. Brown-headed Cowbird: max four TCBC; few singles Bing, Norw, Delhi Feb, post CBC. Pine Grosbeak: max 66 OCBC, 26 BCBC, very high; up to 13-15 scattered Jan-Feb. Purple Finch: max 25 OCBC; few Jan-Feb, scarce. House Finch: max 564 BCBC; 82 OCBC, highest ever; mid-season max 85 Norw 24 Jan (JL); decreasing Feb. White-winged Crossbill: max three OPM 10 Dec still there OCBC; one SCBC. Com. Redpoll: max 88 SCBC and 40 TCBC, high; post CBC max 30 End 24 Jan (FL) and Norw 19-22 Feb (JL). Pine Siskin: CBC max 19 OCBC; many widespread reports 1-9 Jan-Feb, max 100 OPM 1 Feb (MD, KW). Am. Goldfinch: max 145 TCBC and 108 SCBC and OCBC; widespread counts 1-9 Jan-Feb. Evening Grosbeak: max 219 SCBC; mid-season max 80 OPM 22 Jan (MD, KW); widespread counts 5-50 Dec-Feb are below average.

RD 2, Box 68C, Norwich, New York 13815