

REGION 7 — ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

JOHN M.C. PETERSON

A partial answer to the mystery of lingering geese, an Old World duck, gulls who passed up Florida for Adirondack garbage, an early and massive incursion of siskins, and a few odd feeder birds all brightened the winter of 1987-88. Christmas Bird Count variety was great, but overall seasonal variety was poor by recent standards. Whatever one's opinion of the birdlife, it was at least a relatively easy season on both birds and residents who overwintered in the Adirondack-Champlain Region.

A light dusting of snow over much of the Region on 4 Dec was followed by 6 inches of wet snow on 15 Dec. Conditions remained good for the Christmas counts, with 2-10 inches on the ground 26-27 Dec when the Elizabethtown and Saranac Lake counts were held. The month closed cold, however, with windchills to -50°F on 29 Dec. The first half of January was 3°F colder than average, with 3.3" snowfall and 55% possible sunshine in the Champlain district, yet by the end of the month, temperatures ran about 6° milder than average. Ray Brook thermometers dropped to -17°F on 7 Jan, and the shortest ever January thaw on 13 Jan was followed by a "Siberian Express" that plunged the Tupper Lake area to -25°F the next day. Snowfall for the period was similarly light, with six inches at Plattsburgh AFB on 4 Feb and up to a foot of snow at Elizabethtown 12 Feb qualifying as the great storms of the season. A thaw on 18 Feb pushed temperatures above the freezing mark at lower elevations.

The Atlantic Flyway population of Canada Geese has increased 2 1/2-fold since 1950, and each year more geese winter farther north. Among the 1,200 Canada Geese at North West Bay, Westport, on the 19 Dec Ferrisburg, VT/NY, CBC were a few wearing colored neck collars. The numbers inscribed on them were traced for four of the marked honkers. A yellow-collared male banded in Maryland in Feb 1984 had been sighted previously in NY and NJ. A yellow-collared female banded in Maryland in Feb 1985 had turned up in DE, MD, NJ, and PA. A male marked with a yellow collar in Pennsylvania in Feb 1986 had subsequently been sighted in MD, NJ, and PA. Finally, a female banded with an orange collar in northern Quebec in late July 1986 had been previously seen as far south as NJ and PA. Along Champlain the geese feed in cornfields, sometimes persisting even after the lake had frozen, spending sunny days sitting on the ice catching the few rays.

While participating on 20 Dec in a new Vermont-New York Christmas count that includes portions of the Clinton County shoreline, Bob Hagar and Ted Mack spotted a single bird hunkered down on a small ice floe on Monty Bay. As a pair of river otters swam by, the bird got up, moved a bit, and appeared to be feeding on something. Through binoculars and 20-30x spotting scope it appeared chunky, short- and thick-necked, about brant-sized, smaller than a nearby loon and larger than a Herring Gull. The chestnut body contrasted with the creamy head and black bill, legs, and feet of a **Ruddy Shelduck**. Details have been submitted to NYSARC.

Limited open water encouraged Great Blue Herons to linger on the AuSable

River at Keeseville to 24 Dec and on the Saranac River at Saranac Lake to 27 Dec. Similarly, Belted Kingfishers rattled away along the Boquet R. at Elizabethtown to 25 Dec, at a pond near Lewis to 26 Dec, and on the Saranac R. at Saranac Lake to 27 Dec; these are extremely late dates for such inland locations. Gulls also remained inland quite late. Ring-billed Gulls were at Tupper Lake to 8 Dec and at the Westport landfill to 26 Dec, Herring Gulls were at the Inlet landfill to 10 Dec, the Westport landfill to 26 Dec, and at Saranac Lake to 27 Dec. Especially noteworthy was a count period Great Black-backed Gull at Saranac Lake. More expected were the 55 Great Black-backed Gulls along Champlain during the NYS Waterfowl Count in mid January.

Bohemian Waxwings now seem to be an annual visitant in the Champlain district with a record 79 on the 26 Dec Elizabethtown CBC and 214 inside the count circle near Wadhams the following day; others were seen there into Jan. Another northern visitor was hard to find, however. Gary Lee reported that for the first winter in at least 22 years he saw no Pine Grosbeaks near Inlet and there were few reports from elsewhere, five birds on the Saranac Lake CBC providing the seasonal maximum.

The major ornithological event of the winter was the influx of Pine Siskins. The Ferrisburg, VT/NY, CBC recorded 662 on both sides of Lake Champlain, smashing the previous 28-year high count of 110. The Elizabethtown CBC tallied 413 siskins in the Champlain Valley and eastern High Peaks, eclipsing the 15-year mark, also of 110. In the conifers of the Adirondacks, the 32-year high for this species on the Saranac Lake CBC was tripled, with a spectacular total of 1,903 Pine Siskins, counted by just ten observers. Compiler Larry Master felt that although most were observed at feeders, "A widespread synchronous northeastern hemlock mast seed crop probably [was] responsible for the influx of these birds." Other seed crops such as birch or spruce were considered poor, but niger seed consumption at feeders was remarkable.

In addition to the usual complaints of accipiters, unusual "feeder birds" included 7 Wild Turkeys being fed at Wells and 4 Gray Jays accepting crackers near an abandoned cabin at the outlet of Bear Pond (both Hamilton Co. locations). Snow Buntings visited bird feeders at Owls Head and Mountain View (Franklin Co.) and Willsboro Point (Essex Co.). A golden-colored Evening Grosbeak visited a Westport feeder for the second straight winter.

Although a near record 40 species were recorded on the Elizabethtown CBC and a 32-year record of 43 species (plus 4 count week birds) were tallied on the Saranac Lake CBC, only about 75 species were reported during the winter season. This is the lowest total in at least six years and may be attributed to a general decline in birding activity (except for CBCs and the Waterfowl Count), no data from the Plattsburgh CBC, and fewer reports from visiting birders. Banding activity near Elizabethtown was also light, with just 83 individuals of 5 species banded between 6 Dec and 13 Feb. The highlight was the repeat of a Blue Jay banded there on 17 Jan 1983 and now at least 5 1/2 years old, in a winter when jays were absent or in short supply at most feeders.

Contributors: Bartlett & Isabelle Bailey, Helen & Robert Booth, Walter Chapman, Dewey & Joan Clark, Jan Cooper, Charlie Delehanty, Nora Ercole, Susie Frenette, Gregory Furness, Bob Gillis, Anne Hungerford, Elsbeth Johnson, Gary Lee, Theodore Mack, Gertrude MacKenzie, Robert McKinney, Shirley Meisburger, Jim Meritt, Sue

Millar, Edith Mitchell, John Parke, John Peterson, Edward Richardson, Jan Trzeciak, and all the Christmas counters.

LOONS-DUCKS: Great Blue Heron: *intro*. Canada Goose: *intro*. N. Pintail: 1 SLCBC, 2 NYSWC unusual. Ruddy Shelduck: *intro*.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Bald Eagle: 1 Tupper L 2 Dec-6 Jan, 20 Feb (CD), ad SLCBC 27 Dec, imm Willsboro Bay 16 Jan (TM,JP), ad Wickham Marsh 26 Jan (GM,JP), subad Willsboro Bay 6 Feb, ad there 7 Feb (ER), ad Whallon's Bay 23 Feb (JPa) suggests at least five different birds, a good showing. N. Harrier: 2 Tupper L 1 Dec (CD), late. N. Goshawk: widely reported. Rough-legged Hawk: Tupper L 29 Dec an unusual location. Wild Turkey: one Cedar River Rd. in area of summer nest, *intro*. Am. Coot: Port Douglas 16 Jan (TM,JP), late. Ring-billed Gull: *intro*. Herring Gull: *intro*. Great Black-backed Gull: *intro*.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Rock Dove: 505 SLCBC perhaps a legacy of opening ceremonies of the XIII Winter Olympics of 1980. Belted Kingfisher: *intro*.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Gray Jay: *intro*. Blue Jay: *intro*. Bohemian Waxwing: *intro*.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: 15 SLCBC a new count record and suggests a viable population in the Sara-Placid region. Snow Bunting: *intro*. Pine Grosbeak: *intro*. Purple Finch: virtually absent, max 9 SLCBC. House Finch: max 53 SLCBC, a new count record and reflects populations established in some Adirondack villages. Red Crossbill: 14 ECBC, only report. White-winged Crossbill: reported from only 5 locations in flocks of no more than 10 birds. Com. Redpoll: arr Elizabethtown 26 Dec, a few among siskin flocks at feeders in Jan-Feb. Pine Siskin: *intro*. Am. Goldfinch: small numbers wintered. Evening Grosbeak: moderate numbers wintered, *intro*.

Discovery Farm, RD 1, Elizabethtown, NY 12932

REGION 8 — HUDSON-MOHAWK

LINDA ARMSTRONG

This winter season Region 8 was a picture postcard place. Snow covered the ground, lakes and reservoirs were frozen solidly as usual, and open water existed at only a few river locations. December was warmer than normal and the Northeast Regional Climate Center reported below normal snowfall. January was a mixture of numerous snowstorms and two brief thaws. Although overall precipitation was below normal, there were enough storms to keep us from noticing. Temperatures averaged on the cooler side even with the thaws, for there were nasty periods when frigid arctic air poured into the Region. With or without the groundhog, winter kept us company all of February with cold temperatures and many days of snow.

Bird feeders were occupied by the normal wintering species. Black-capped Chickadees cheered up even the coldest days and Northern Cardinals provided splashes of gorgeous color against the snowy backdrop. Tufted Titmice, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches and Brown Creepers kept our eyes watching as busy birds flitted about backyards. American Goldfinches and House