

REGION 7 — ADIRONDACK-CHAMPLAIN

JOHN M.C. PETERSON

The most notable birds during the winter of 1989-90 were almost a continuation from the fall season. As then, there were lots of Bald Eagle, Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak, and White-winged Crossbill across the four northeastern counties, with a few other surprises thrown in as well. A total of 82 species was reported, or just two fewer than last winter, and with good variety and numbers on Regional Christmas Bird Counts. Species honors went to the NYS side of the Ferrisburg circle with 53, while Saranac Lake CBC had the individuals high count of 4,770, about a quarter of which were White-winged Crossbill!

If the birds were much the same, the weather was most unusual, even for the North Country. This was the coldest December since at least 1831 (when local records commence), with readings of -20°F at Newcomb on 2 Dec, -20°F at Elizabethtown 8 Dec, -25°F at Paul Smiths 9 Dec, and -20°F at Newcomb 29 Dec typical figures for the month. January, by contrast, was balmy, with a classic thaw late in the month: Plattsburgh 37°F on 23 Jan, Lake Placid 44°F on 25 Jan, and Plattsburgh 39°F on 27 Jan. Snow was mainly at higher elevations; on 12 Jan, for example, Lake Placid received 10 inches, while Elizabethtown picked up only an inch. There was a major 2-ft. snowfall at the end of January. February similarly saw some unseasonably warm temperatures Regionwide: sunny 40°F on 1 Feb, Plattsburgh reached 39°F on 6-7 Feb and 44°F on 9 Feb, and even Saranac Lake climbed to 47°F on Washington's Birthday. The birds were undoubtedly as relieved as those buying fuel oil to see the break in the weather. By the close of the period, the first three Red-winged Blackbird had even shown up at Franklin Falls on 27 Feb.

The trainmen aboard Amtrak's "Adirondack" turbotrain, following the scenic old D&H tracks along Lake Champlain on its run from NYC to Montreal, reported regular sightings of Bald Eagle all winter. Nor were they alone. Consider first, though, that during the Olympic Winter of 1979-80 there were *no* Bald Eagles reported here. Then consider, and savor, the following from winter 1989-90: an adult near Westport 13 Dec, an immature at North West Bay 24 Dec-7 Jan, an adult at Essex harbor 6 Jan, a transitional adult at Wickham Marsh and a full adult at Willsboro Point 20 Jan, two at Valcour Island and Ausable Point 27 Jan, an adult Limekiln Lake 12 Feb and at Seventh Lake 20 Feb, another at Indian Lake Dam, a subadult at Tupper Lake 5-21 Feb, an immature at Essex

harbor 24 Feb, and an adult again at Willsboro Point 24 Feb. Even given some duplication, this magnificent species is obviously recovering well.

Bohemian Waxwing, as promised, put in a strong appearance too. At least 215 were found on the Essex County lake shore side of the Ferrisburg CBC circle 16 Dec. They also penetrated higher elevations than usual: seven at Lake Placid on 30 Jan; 20 at Terry Mt., CLIN, 9 Feb, and three on the Paul Smiths College campus, FRAN, the first two weeks of Feb, leaving only Hamilton County devoid of this striking northerner.

Small flocks of Pine Grosbeak were found on three CBCs and at other locales, with a lovely, rosy male still visiting Charlcie Delehanty's Tupper Lake feeder at the end of Feb. White-winged Crossbill was found on four CBCs, with an incredible 1,146 counted (by just 14 observers) on the Saranac Lake CBC. Gary Lee reported them "Everywhere the whole period and still around, but fewer in numbers now," a feeling echoed by Bob Hagar, who thought they "thinned dramatically by Feb 6th and while still around are hard to find now." All of the other winter finches, except Hoary Redpoll, were present, but in mixed numbers. House Finch was on one CBC and the Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club found a max 40 at Essex 24 Feb. Red Crossbill was on two CBCs and among four at Owls Head on Valentine's Day, a male was apparently mate-feeding. Common Redpoll were thinly scattered and found only on one CBC; they arrived at Owls Head 3 Dec, with a max of 13 there on 7 Dec, and the HMBC still found a few near Essex to 24 Feb. On the same date the visiting Hudson-Mohawk birders found, "lots of siskins— they were everywhere, at every feeder in flocks of 40, 50, 60, 100+!" They certainly were numerous, turning up on three CBCs, with a max 636 on the Saranac Lake CBC. Both "green-morph" and "gray-morph" Pine Siskin showed up among the flock of 150+ at the editor's feeder near Elizabethtown (see *American Birds*, 43(5, Winter):1268-1274; 1989). But the most striking individual was among those at the Furness feeder near Mineville that was "obviously a siskin, but looks like all the world as if it was trying to impersonate a Hoary Redpoll!" The impression given by this leucistic individual was of a white bird with dark face, wings, and tail. There were fewer American Goldfinch (four CBCs, max 306 Elizabethtown CBC) and Evening Grosbeak (three CBCs, max 772 Elizabethtown CBC).

On New Year's Eve, Arthur Dodge of Westport and a companion were skating on newly frozen North West Bay when they encountered some 51 dead Canada Goose, American Black Duck, and Mallard frozen in the ice about 100 feet offshore from the NYS Boat Launching Site,

where some 1,251 Canada Goose, 27 Am. Black Duck, and 266 Mallard had been counted in the same area on the 16 Dec Ferrisburg CBC. North Country SPCA president, Robert Lopez, D.V.M., blamed the deaths on local feeding of feral domestic geese and the wild flocks at the launch site in recent years. "Abnormal feeding by well-meaning people has drastically upset their normal behavior. They're killing them with kindness," said Lopez. An immature Turkey Vulture found grounded in the Adirondacks this winter and, while being rehabilitated at the Westport Rehabilitation Center, seemed grateful for the waterfowl carcasses, according to Dr. Craig Russell, who successfully released this feathered recycler during the January thaw.

And there were, as always, a few rarities. Bob Hagar found a drake **Barrow's Goldeneye** a half-mile north of Ausable Point, south of Valcour Island, CLIN, on 6 Feb, where it remained through 24 Feb, according to Hagar and Ted Mack. Helen Menwissen was surprised to encounter a male **Spruce Grouse** on Benson Road, about a mile west of Rt. 30, southern HAMI, during the first week of Jan: "It ambled across the road very nonchalantly, with no concern at all for my approaching car." Rarely reported anywhere in winter, this is yet another unexpected record from south of its documented Atlas range. Bob Hagar also located a male **Red-bellied Woodpecker** on Dunn Road near Chazy, CLIN, on 6 Feb.

Remember that your own rarity or record of unusual behavior may be of interest far beyond New York State. Our note with Greg Furness of his careful observations of "Common Redpolls excavating snow burrows and snow bathing" (*Kingbird* 37:74-75; 1987) has subsequently brought enquiries and requests for reprints from redpoll researchers in Michigan, North Dakota, Ohio, Newfoundland, Ontario, Belgium, France, Germany, and Spain. One who regularly contributed such notes and observations was Mark Gretch of Clinton County, who is moving to the wilds of Region 1. His contributions to our knowledge of the birds of the Adirondack-Champlain region have been considerable. We're grateful, Mark, for your tireless efforts, recognizing that our loss is the Niagara Frontier's gain.

Contributors: Joan Charboneau, Charlcie Delehanty, John David Delehanty, Marion Delehanty, Arthur Dodge, Tom Duffus, John Fritz, Emily Geddes, Robert Hagar, Rudy Hagland, Terry Hall, Candy Hess, Hudson-Mohawk Bird Club, Anne Hungerford, Robert Kurtz, Gary Lee, William Lee, Robert Lopez, Theodore Mack, Helen Menwissen, Edith Mitchell, Dan Nickerson, John & Susan Peterson, Gary Randorf, Craig Russell, Jeanne Shonyon, Mary Ann Tebo, Jan Trzeciak, and all the Christmas Bird Counters.

Abbreviations: CICBC - Champlain Islands Christmas Bird Count; ECBC Elizabethtown Christmas Bird Count; FCBC - Ferrisburg Christmas Bird Count 16 Dec; SLCBC - Saranac Lake Christmas Bird Count 30 Dec.

LOONS-DUCKS: Canada Goose: *intro*. Am. Black Duck: *intro*. Mallard: *intro*. Oldsquaw: pair Whallon's Bay from fall to 8 Jan (RH), but not FCBC. **Barrow's Goldeneye**: *intro*.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: *intro*. Bald Eagle: *intro*. Red-tailed Hawk: 1 SLCBC new to count. Rough-legged Hawk: one SLCBC also new. Gray Partridge: Chazy Dec only report. **Spruce Grouse**: *intro*. Wild Turkey: 16 ECBC new; also two hens Tupper Lake 2 Dec, two in Tupper Lake yard 24 Jan, and two toms all winter Inlet from 8 Jan at deer feeders shows continued survival in Adirondack interior. Am. Coot: two FCBC unusual. Herring Gull: three SLCBC new. Great Black-backed Gull: one ECBC new.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Short-eared Owl: two fighting over prey ECBC new to count. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**: *intro*. Black-backed Woodpecker: 1 SLCBC and Ferd's Bog 17 Jan only reports.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: max 160 FCBC and 142 CICBC good numbers, but report from Indian L. shop 9 Feb (GL) almost as unexpected as the Inlet dump report last winter. Gray Jay: six SLCBC, plus Moose RRA 2 Dec and Ferd's Bog 17 Jan a good showing. Com. Raven: max 12 ECBC a new high, plus reports of many patrolling highways picking up road-killed crossbills and siskins. Boreal Chickadee: max five ECBC, also one SLCBC, three Sabattis Road Bog 24 Feb, and Moose RRA 1 Dec, Seventh L 13 Feb representative of most winters. Tufted Titmouse: reports from Port Henry and Willsboro Point expected, but arr Inlet feeder 9 Dec through period quite a find. E. Bluebird: three males Westport only report (EG). **Hermit Thrush**: Saranac Lake feeder 4-29 Dec, when it hit window and died; a new SLCBC count week bird, just missing the count day, alas. Am. Robin: seven FCBC, under tree in Baldwin Rd. yard near Ticonderoga after overnight rain 1 Jan (JC), one wintering in Tupper Lake village Jan; fewer than some recent winters. **Brown Thrasher**: briefly at feeder near Elizabethtown 10 Feb (SP), only fifth winter record for Region. Bohemian Waxwing: *intro*. Cedar Waxwing: 22 FCBC, only report. N. Shrike: given the number of siskins at feeders, reports seemed alarmingly low; the four reports were from the Lakeshore Rd., ESSE, 21 Dec (JFRK), SLCBC, one killed a Downy Woodpecker Inlet feeder 22 Dec and was singing by the same house at entrance to Moose RRA 4 Feb (GL), and the last was calling (?) Owls Head 11:15 AM, 23 Feb (JT).

VIREOS-WARBLED: Yellow-rumped Warbler: three FCBC not unprecedented but still a good find, feeding in red cedars near Split Rock Point and Grog Harbor.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: max 15 ECBC indicative of generally high numbers, while a pair wintering well outside hamlet of Elizabethtown are indicative of another general outward movement. Song Sparrow: one FCBC, two ECBC, one SLCBC, an excellent showing for this half-hardy unrecorded in some winters. White-throated Sparrow: three FCBC, max six SLCBC, and two

wintering Tupper L even better than last winter's exceptional showing. Dark-eyed Junco: 117 ECBC typical of high numbers this winter. Lapland Longspur: 31 CICBC only report of this "birders' bird." Snow Bunting: max 587 ECBC and 40-100 wintered in an Owls Head yard. Red-winged Blackbird: four FCBC and four Lake Shore Rd., ESSE, 21 Dec unusual in winter here. Com. Grackle: three SLCBC notable anywhere, but especially at higher elevations. Pine Grosbeak through Evening Grosbeak: *intro*.

Discovery Farm, RD 1, Elizabethtown, NY 12932