

## **REGION 4 — SUSQUEHANNA**

**MARY DOBINSKY**

Ho-Hum! Another mild, open winter! Another dull birding season! December 1990 and February 1991 were considerably warmer than usual, according to weather reports from Link Field. Although January experienced nearly normal temperatures, they still were 2° above average. Record high readings of 60° to 62° were reached on four days in late December, with above average temperatures 23 days of the month. December precipitation, mostly rain, measured two inches above normal, capping a very wet 1990. Until the season's only heavy (a mere six to eight inches) snowfall on 11 Jan, snow had melted almost as soon as it fell. The ground had been bare. The week of 21 Jan, with five nights of single digit temperatures, afforded the only extended cold period.

The one night officially below-zero was 22 Jan, although the Region's northern communities would insist it hit zero more often than that. The coldest spot that one night was Cooperstown with a -16° reading, and ice finally and officially locked in Otsego Lake, a very late date. Precipitation for both January and February was slightly below normal. Binghamton snowfall in January measured a scant 15 inches, five inches under average. Total snowfall in February was an inch below the 17.5 inch norm, and for the second year in a row, February temperatures averaged about 6° above normal.

Heavy late December rains caused flooding along the Susquehanna and Chenango Rivers on 30 and 31 Dec, at time of the Broome and Tioga Christmas Bird Counts. Judy and Don Bell bemoaned floodwaters that blocked access to choice birding sites. Yet Jonathan Shepherd, on the Broome Count, had no complaint. Amid 90 Herring Gulls, he spotted a second winter **Iceland Gull**. He was able to verify size, bill coloration and leg color for identification. It was a first for Region 4.

Despite the balmy winter, few less hardy birds persisted and even the usual species disappeared in January. There were such contradictions as Tufted Titmouse at feeders but no junco, or Red-bellied Woodpecker but no Blue Jay. Veteran birder Harriet Marsi complained, "I don't think I've ever known a winter when birds were so scarce - not only at the feeder but also in the country." The winter wild food supply had looked plentiful in early fall was not so at the onset of winter. Had the fall's heavy rains and strong winds stripped trees, shrubs and plants of their fruits and seeds?

Rivers remained more or less open all season boosting the winter population of Canada Goose and some diving ducks to new records. Geese totals were particularly impressive. Flocks of up to 250 birds all through December culminated in the TCBC report of a startling 2,004 birds. Dave Messineo at Otselic spotted occasional small flights all season. The staff of Finch Hollow Nature Center marveled at 100 geese in Cole Park the week of 11 Feb. "The lake was frozen over at this time - no open water."

With few birds to see mid winter, birders tend to be more observant of those they find. Such was the case with Bruce Bozdos, Gail Kirch, Marsi and Steve Rice as they twice studied "small flocks (one or two dozen) of Com. Mergansers". Each time they first noted the size difference of one duck. "After 15 minutes of intense concentration, we were able to get the

good look at the breast we needed - a good silhouette of the head etc. for our identification." The odd one was a female Hooded Merganser on 12 Jan and a female Red-breasted Merganser on 18 Feb. Another 12 Hooded and three Red-breasted Merganser, both uncommon in winter, were reported on the January Waterfowl counts.

Predators fared well this open winter. At least 50 Bald Eagles wintered in Delaware County according to Thomas Sanford of Margaretville. As a volunteer for the state's Department of Environmental Conservation, he conducted official ground and aerial surveys in December and January in the areas of Delaware and Schoharie counties that surround the New York City Reservoir system. Pretty wild country, it is considered excellent habitat for the growing number of Bald Eagle.

In this third successive mild winter, southern species, which repeatedly try to expand their range northward, were more entrenched than ever. Tufted Titmouse led the pack. The record 263 spotted on all five CBC's more than doubled the total of two years ago, itself a record. Carolina Wren and N. Mockingbird showed more moderate gains. Most disappointing was the scarcity of winter finches. No Pine Grosbeak or White-winged Crossbill were seen. A single small flock of Red Crossbills at McDonough 13 Dec was reported to Chad Covey and a single flock of six redpoll was spotted on the Cortland CBC. Pine Siskin reports were limited to 16 birds on two CBC's.

Occasional Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher and Am. Robin were reported all season. Missed were Common Loon, all grebe species, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Hermit Thrush, White-crowned Sparrow and Rusty Blackbird.

Observers: C. & J. Baldwin, R. & J. Barnes, D. & J. Bell, R. Bennett, L. Bemont, B. Bozdos, M. Clark, C. Covey, M. Davis (MDv), M. Dobinsky, S. Dorber, M. Ferranti, P. & E. Getkin, G. Kirch, M. Layton, S. Levin, H. Marsi, A. Mason, D. Messineo, R. Milliken, S. O'Connell, B. Pantle, M. Petuh, S. Rice, I. Rowe, J. Sedlacek, T. & N. Tasber, B. Toner, G. Wade, A. Whitaker, D. Windsor, I. Wright.

Abbreviations: BCBC - Binghamton Christmas Bird Count, 30 Dec; Can Res - Cannonsville Res; ChCBC - Chenango Christmas Bird Count, 15 Dec; CCBC - Cortland Christmas Bird Count, 29 Dec; FHNC - Finch Hollow Nature Center; OCBC - Oneonta Christmas Bird Count, 15 Dec; OPM - Oneonta, Portlandville, Milford; TCBC - Tioga Christmas Bird Count, 31 Dec; WFC - Waterfowl Count.

LOONS-DUCKS: Snow Goose: only one report TIOG, Feb. Canada Goose: *intro*. Am. Black Duck: max 70 CCBC; 73 Can Res 20 Jan (SD); up to five other

reports a month. Mallard: max 635 on five CBC's and 539 WFC. Gadwall: two Chen Forks 27 Feb (FHNC staff) only report. Canvasback: only one TIOG Feb (RB). Redhead: three CCBC, only report. Ring-necked Duck 19 CCBC, only report. Greater Scaup: 41 CCBC, only second report in 15 CBC's. Lesser Scaup: 36 CCBC, high. Com. Goldeneye: max 37 on three CBC's; 32 WFC; up to four reports/month, high. Bufflehead: two Jan and one Feb reports, TIOG (C&J B, AW), only ones. Hooded Merganser: *intro*. Com. Merganser: up to 90/month all season, high. Red-breasted Merganser: *intro*.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: N. Harrier: max eight TCBC; arr Windsor 2 Feb (JS), max four TIOG 18 Feb (HM, BB, GK), high. Bald Eagle: *intro*. Sharp-shinned Hawk: nine on four CBC's; four to seven Jan/Feb; 12 in Feb, low. Cooper's Hawk: 10 on five CBC's; frequent at two BROO feeders through 15 Feb (MP, SR); three other reports, good numbers. N. Goshawk: singles BROO 20 Dec (ML) and CORT 12 Feb only reports. Red-tailed Hawk: max 79 five CBC's; mid winter max six 18 Feb. Rough-legged Hawk: seven reports, max three, high. Am. Kestrel: seven-eight/month, good numbers. Ring-necked Pheasant: one OCBC, two BCBC, only reports. Ruffed Grouse: "several" early Dec (JS); 12 four CBC's; only one/two after Dec, low. Wild Turkey: max 100 Harpursville, DELA 15 Feb (AM), good counts all season. Killdeer: arr TIOG Feb (D&JB). Am. Woodcock: one TIOG 8 Dec (D&JB) only third winter report in 11 years. **Bonaparte's Gull**: TCBC, first one in many years. Ring-billed Gull: max 50 Otsego L 27 Dec. Herring Gull: max 153 CCBC. Great Black-backed Gull: two CCBC, one TIOG Feb (D&JB & RB), only reports. **Iceland Gull**: *intro*.

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: max 350 five CBC's. E. Screech-Owl: five on two CBC's; two BROO Dec; one banded Candor Feb (BP), good. Great Horned Owl: 13 on three CBC's; five other Dec reports decreasing to two Feb, low. Snowy Owl: one TIOG 6 Jan (R&MS), often missed. Barred Owl: one BROO 11 Dec (JS); one each ChCBC and BCBC, only reports. N. Saw-whet Owl: one banded Candor Feb. (BP). Belted Kingfisher: eleven on four CBC's; four to six/month, good. Red-bellied Woodpecker: seven CCBC & TCBC; seven singles Dec decreasing to four Feb, all TIOG. N. Flicker: arr Endwell Golf Club 6 Feb (MP) and one TIOG (B&EM), early. Pileated Woodpecker: 12 on five CBC's; five other Dec singles; two OTSE Jan-Feb, low.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: Horned Lark: 33 ChCBC; only report until six Homer 9 Feb; max 70 CHEN 16 Feb and 50 BROO 25 Feb. Am. Crow: max 1541 TCBC; midwinter max 400 OPM 12 Feb, high counts all season. Black-capped Chickadee: max 2212 five CBC's, winter stalwart of field and feeder. Tufted Titmouse: *intro*. Red-breasted Nuthatch: 28 five CBC's; one daily after 25 Dec (MDv); four to five other sites/month, very low after last year's incursion. Brown Creeper: 18 five CBC's; only two to four sites/month, scarce. Golden-crowned Kinglet: 11 three CBC's; "common" three BROO sites 8, 9 and 11 Dec (JS) dwindling to two sites Feb (T&NT, DM). Ruby-crowned Kinglet: only one BCBC. E. Bluebird: only one TCBC. Brown Thrasher: one Ivor Rowe's feeder Virgil until

12 Feb, seldom in winter. Cedar Waxwing: five on two CBC's, continuing scarce (one other report) until four reports Feb, max 30 TIOG 18 Feb. N. Shrike: one each TCBC and OCBC; one Otselic, "several sightings" all season (DM); one Linklean 3 Jan and one McDonough 22 Jan (CC); one CORT 27 Jan "a lifer for us" (MP&MF); one TIOG Jan (AW); one OPM 2 Feb (MD); last TIOG 18 Feb (HM et al), most reports in 12 years.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: a record 299 on five CBC's, twice the previous high. Rufous-sided Towhee: one TCBC, only one. Am. Tree Sparrow: 365 on five CBC's; after early Jan mostly singles eight to 10 reports/month, scarce. Chipping Sparrow: two TCBC only report. Song Sparrow: 19 three CBC's; three others TIOG Dec; one DELA 2 Jan last (AM). Swamp Sparrow: only one ChCBC. White-throated Sparrow: up to four BROO feeder through 15 Feb (MP); two other singles, low. Dark-eyed Junco: 3825 CBC's, scarce in Jan. Snow Bunting: 40 OCBC; small flocks all season CHEN(DM); max 100 BROO 7 Jan (HM, mob); last BROO 26 Feb (SR). Red-winged Blackbird: none overwintered; arr 30 OPM 21 Feb and 200 McDonough 22 Feb. Com. Grackle: two TIOG reports, Jan; arr CHEN 23 Feb (DW). Brown-headed Cowbird: one TCBC, only fall leftover; arr BROO 4 Feb (SR). Purple Finch: seven OCBC, four CCBC; one BROO 15 Jan (MP) and one 2 Feb (JS) only reports, very scarce. House Finch: 1839 five CBC's; common all season. Red Crossbill: *intro*. Am. Goldfinch: 384 five CBC's; scarce Jan, mostly at feeders. Evening Grosbeak: occasional small flocks all season; midwinter max 120 Milford 20 Feb (AM), good compared to recent years.

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