

REGION 10 — MARINE

SEYMOUR SCHIFF AND ALVIN WOLLIN

It's now official. As we reach the end of 1991, we find that both the year and the winter were the warmest on record. This does not mean that there were neither cold days nor extended periods of frozen ponds. It's just that the days, for the most part, were passable although the birding was only fair. The winter also was rather dry compared to normal, with December's rain a half inch short, January two-thirds of an inch short, and February a quarter inch short. The 7.36 inches which did fall in the three months came mostly as rain.

The most evident effect of the warm weather was the large number of lingering migrants seen on the various Christmas Bird Counts. In addition, there were a number of unusual wintering birds and some very early migrants, of which some possibly were just overlooked as wintering birds.

In spite of the warm weather, the new year brought us what was possible the best Snowy Owl season in years. This was definitely a flight year for Long Island. Reports started on 1 Dec and continued as late as 19 Feb. Early to mid February reports included, from west to east, two at Floyd Bennett Field/Breezy Point, four at Jones Beach, two at Cedar Beach, two at

Shinnecock, and one at Orient Point. That's eleven widely spaced birds, all at about the same time. Other earlier reports came from Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge to the west and Montauk Point to the east. It's hard to decide exactly how many owls were actually seen in the Region this winter, since a bird to the east could have been a bird to the west at a later date and vice versa. As a guess, a minimum of a eighteen to two dozen Snowy Owl passed through the Region this season. In many cases, the owls were clearly visible by scope from the parking lots which saved a lot of wear and tear on birders, if not on the owls themselves. Most of the Snowy Owl seen by your Regional Editors appeared much whiter than those we have seen in recent years and were probably older birds. This is another indication of a flight year. We were not just seeing a few wandering immature birds. At dusk on 10 Feb, Peter Martin watched a Snowy Owl catch and eat a Bonaparte's Gull on the dunes at Jones Beach.

Floyd Bennett Field has become the place to see raptors in the Winter. Jean and Ronald Bourque's report to us for the season lists Northern Harrier (decreased numbers), Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, American Kestrel (numbers down), Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Barn Owl, Snowy Owl (noted above), Long-eared Owl (in February), Short-eared Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl (in January). Red-tailed Hawk was by far the most common and conspicuous of the raptors during the winter across the Region.

Northern Gannets were seen for the first time on a Staten Island Christmas Bird Count; in recent years this species has been seen with increasing frequency in inshore waters, such as Jones Inlet, western Long Island Sound and New York harbor off Staten Island, as opposed to more open oceanic waters.

There were unusual patterns of waterfowl distribution this Winter. We can separate the phenomenon into two groups, domestic and foreign. Under the former, there were numerous winter reports of Wood Duck. In the aggregate, we have seen a winter season high count for the region. Incomplete records from only some of the Christmas Bird Counts totaled 45, including 17 on the Queens CBC. This number may be higher when all the reports are in. For the foreign species there are a number of items. First, there was a report of a Eurasian Green-winged Teal at Speonk River 13-23 Feb, first reported by James Clinton. Second there were 14 Eurasian Wigeon reported from Brooklyn to Mattituck, about 8-10 more than usual. Third, there were five distinct location sightings of Tufted Duck along the SUFF shore from Robert

Moses State Park to Mastic (20 Jan to 17 Feb); while this may represent only one duck moving around; John Ruscica and James Clinton, who made more than one sighting, believe there were at least two different birds and provided separate details for each.

Very few Purple Sandpiper were seen at the usual jetties after December, compared to prior periods. Most reports were for fewer than a half dozen as against the several dozen or more usually seen after December. This was the second winter we saw numbers of alcids, with most reports coming from Montauk. This year, we also saw more records of Northern Shrike than in recent years, but not one for Loggerhead Shrike. Except for a very few spotty records, there were no reports of winter finches.

We did have our usual spate of unusual birds. The most notable was a report of a **Pacific Loon** seen by Starr Saphir and Robert Machover in mid December. A report was submitted to NYSARC. A single sighting of a gray **Gyr Falcon** was reported at Floyd Bennett Field on 17 Jan by an experienced birder, but the report comes via the NYRBA without details. Meanwhile, a very dark, exceptionally large Peregrine Falcon wintered to the east on the south shore. This bird perched on the Jones Beach water tower with a very much smaller pale Peregrine during the season. If this pair nests, this would be a new site. A **Franklin's Gull** was discovered by Paul Gillen, Jr. on 12 Dec at the McDonald's Restaurant on Route 24 near Riverhead. It was reasonably tame, but appeared to wander. When it could be found, it allowed good views. The bird remained till 10 Jan. Mr. Gillen also reported an albino Ring-billed Gull during January and February at the head of Town Creek on Young's Avenue, Southold. A **Black-throated Gray Warbler**, the second of the year, was found on the Queens Christmas Count but no written details were submitted. A **Black-headed Grosbeak** was reported at a feeder on W. 77th St, Manhattan, on 2 Jan by Sarah Plimpton (*vide* NYRBA).

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Abbreviations: APP - Alley Pond Park; BNL - Brookhaven National Laboratory; BCBC - Brooklyn Christmas Bird Count, 14 Dec; CCBC - Captree Christmas Bird Count, 15 Dec; CP - Central Park, Manhattan; FBF - Floyd Bennett Field; FP - Forest Park; HSP - Hecksher State Park; HLSP - Hempstead Lake State Park; IPD - Island Park Dump; JBWR - Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge; JFKWS - John F. Kennedy Wildlife

Sanctuary (Tobay); JBch - Jones Beach; JBWE - Jones Beach West End; LI - Long Island; MCBC - Montauk Christmas Bird Count, 14 Dec; MPt - Montauk Point; MutP - Muttontown Preserve; NCBC - Northern Nassau Christmas Bird Count, 21 Dec; NYRBA - New York Rare Bird Alert; PBP - Pelham Bay Park; PtL - Point Lookout; QCBC - Queens Christmas Bird Count, 14 Dec; ShIn - Shinnecock Inlet; SI - Staten Island; SCBC - Southern Nassau Christmas Bird Count, 29 Dec.

LOONS-DUCKS: **Pacific Loon:** *intro*. Red-necked Grebe: two MPt 14 Dec, two Brooklyn 12 Jan, one E Moriches 26 Jan to 3 Feb (JF, mob), one PtL first two weeks Feb (mob), one MPt 23 Feb (NYRBA). Shearwater species: a small shearwater seen from shore MPt 5 Dec (EL, AWI). N. Gannet: *intro*, 4000+ MPt 5 Dec (Jeanette Doran, Art Gruebel, HR), 5000 BCBC. Great Cormorant: becoming common enough on the south shore to be mentioned only casually by contributors. Great Egret: max 32 SCBC, very high total; other singles. Snowy Egret: one SCBC. Little Blue Heron: singles QCBC, SCBC, and IPD 19 Dec (EL, AWI). Green-backed Heron: one Bronx-Weschester CBC 22 Dec. Tundra Swan: 500-700 Hook Pd, Montauk (mob). Greater White-fronted Goose: one Hook Pd 12 Jan (A. Morris). Snow Goose: blue morph JBWR 8 Dec (AK). Wood Duck: *intro*. Green-winged Teal: *intro*. Eurasian Wigeon: *intro*. Tufted Duck: *intro*. Com. Eider: 30 MPt 5 Dec building to 200+ on 25 Jan, 70 on 9 Feb (NYRBA), one JBWE 7-29 Dec. King Eider: 15 MPt 5 Dec, building to 28 on 14 Dec, some to mid Feb; nine PtL 7 Dec, 11 there 19 Jan, some lingered to end of period. Harlequin Duck: seven PtL 7 Dec, up to 11 overwintered. Barrow's Goldeneye: one wintered Three Mile Harbor (mob) and another at the Bronx end of the Whitestone bridge (SW).

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Turkey Vulture: one Glen Cove 21 Feb (David Allen). Bald Eagle: one Riverhead 28 Dec, Three Mile Harbor 25 Jan, probably wintered on e LI; one PBP 8 Feb (NYRBA). Cooper's Hawk: numerous, widespread reports, definitely more this winter. N. Goshawk: one wintered at JFKWS, others reported. Red-shouldered Hawk: one IPD 19 Dec (EL, AWI), one HLSP SCBC, one MPt 17 Feb (SW). Broad-winged Hawk: one MCBC; one IPD 19 Dec (EL, AWI), one JBch 2 Feb (SS, AWI). Rough-legged Hawk: *intro*, others reported. Am. Kestrel: few birds at many sites. Merlin: *intro*, others reported. Peregrine Falcon: *intro*, others reported. Clapper Rail: one Dune Road 7 Feb (JR). Virginia Rail: several seen on CBCs. Com. Moorhen: one CCBC. Semipalmated Plover: one NCBC and 23 Dec. Am. Oystercatcher: BCBC, SCBC; arrived on territory 23 Feb (NYRBA). Greater Yellowlegs: usual numbers. Lesser Yellowlegs: two Orient CBC 28 Dec. Whimbrel: one CCBC. Sanderling: much fewer than usual along the beaches in NASS. Purple Sandpiper: *intro*. Am. Woodcock: one in display flight along the Wantagh Parkway 28 Jan (PM), other flight displays latter in season. **Franklin's Gull:** *intro*. Little Gull: one ShIn 7 Dec, Easthampton 19 Feb, Hook Pd 29 Feb (NYRBA). Com. Black-headed Gull: one or more JBch and PtL all winter (mob); one ShIn all winter (mob); one Sheepshead Bay BCBC; one Manhattan 27 Jan-9 Feb (NYRBA). Iceland Gull: one JBch 8 Dec, one MPt 5 Jan, two imm, ad ShIn Jan and Feb (PG), one CP reservoir, one Fort Pd, Montauk 16-29 Feb. Lesser Black-backed Gull: two BCBC, three NCBC. Glaucous Gull: one Great Kills P SI 8 Jan (HF), one MPt 5 Jan, imm ShIn 14 Jan (PG), one Hook Pd 23 Feb.

Black-legged Kittiwake: four SCBC, one JBWE Feb 2 (SS, AWI), two JBWE 20 Feb (PM), others. Com. Tern: one MPt 8 Dec (JF). Forster's Tern: one PtL 6 Dec (JF), one ShIn 7 Dec, one PtL 7 Dec. Dovekie: three MPt 5 Dec (EL). **Thick-billed Murre**: one MPt 29 Feb (AB). Razorbill: nine MCBC, seen regularly there through the period, max 28 on 5 Jan (NYRBA).

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Great Horned Owl: female on nest PBP 21 Feb (DT). Snowy Owl: *intro*. Long-eared Owl: *intro*, fewer than last winter. Short-eared Owl: *intro*. N. Saw-whet Owl: four SCBC, two PBP 21 Feb (DT), others. Red-headed Woodpecker: imm MutP NCBC, one CP late Dec (NYRBA).

FLYCATCHERS-STARLING: **Least Flycatcher**: one Acabonack from Nov to MCBC (Hugh Mc Guinness). E. Phoebe: one MCBC, one BNL 10 Feb (JC), two APP 14 Feb (AWg, SY), one APP 21 Feb (DT). W. Kingbird: one Gardner's P, W Babylon 8-22 Dec; one Ft Tilden 11-14 Dec; one MCBC; one QCBC; one Shinnecock 1 Jan. (NYRBA). Tree Swallow: last 13 JBWR 12 Jan (NYRBA). House Wren: on a few CBCs. Marsh Wren: on a few CBCs. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher: one MCBC. E. Bluebird: some wintered in central SUFF. Am. Robin: partial albino in a flock of 75 robins MutP 7 Jan (Allan Lindberg). N. Shrike: singles JFKWS 2-26 Jan, Caumsett 12 Jan (Tim O'Conner), HSP 23-24 Feb, N Pt 26 Feb, Big Reed Pd, MPt (NYRBA).

VIREOS-WARBLED: Orange-crowned Warbler: one MCBC, one SCBC. **Black-throated Gray Warbler**: *intro*. Pine Warbler: at suet and thistle feeder Roslyn Heights 17 Feb (HR). Palm Warbler: max three SCBC; one MPt 5 Jan (JF). Ovenbird: one SCBC. Com. Yellowthroat: last SCBC. Yellow-breasted Chat: a half dozen reports scattered from Brooklyn to Montauk in Dec and early Jan.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **Black-headed Grosbeak**: *intro*. Dickcissel: one PtL Nov to 11 Jan (mob). **Clay-colored Sparrow**: one Ditch Plains 14 Dec (TB, G.Tudor, mob). Vesper Sparrow: one MCBC. Savannah Sparrow: 31 Ipswich race SCBC; we are seeing very many more of these birds. Sharp-tailed Sparrow: a few. Seaside Sparrow: a few. Lapland Longspur: one CCBC, two Smith Pt Co P 16-23 Feb, one to end of period (NYRBA). Snow Bunting: flocks SI, JBWE, CB (mob). E. Meadowlark: two dozen wintered FBF (J&RB), others noted. Yellow-headed Blackbird: one BCBC (no details or observer *fide* NYRBA). Rusty Blackbird: 30 wintered at Shu Swamp, Mill Neck. Boat-tailed Grackle: a group wintered in Jamaica Bay area. Com. Grackle: 1000 Baiting Hollow 1 Dec, 250 1 Jan (JC). Brown-headed Cowbird: a flock of 100+ wintered in PtL. N. Oriole: one PtL 1 Jan (TB, SS, mob), one Riverdale 22 Jan, one CP 30 Dec; **Bullock's race** JBWR 8 Jan (AK). Purple Finch: L Success 20 Jan (AWg, SY). Red Crossbill: L Success 20 Jan (AWg, SY). Com. Redpoll: two Napaque 14 Dec (JF). Evening Grosbeak: six BNL 3 Feb (Henry Halama *fide* JR).

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