

REGION 4 — SUSQUEHANNA

MARY DOBINSKY

This, the fourth mild, open winter in a row for Region 4, while no standout, was different. This was the only year when each of the three winter months was both warmer and drier than normal. Temperatures for each month were about four degrees above average. Yet the winter "didn't come close" to being the warmest on record, according to Harold Hollis, National Weather observer at Cooperstown, where village records date back to 1854. Nor were there any record daily highs or lows. At Binghamton, temperatures dropped below zero (-2°F) for the first night in the season on 16 Jan. Another sub-zero night struck 13 Feb. After that, warmer nights and daytime highs near or above 40°F persisted through the rest of the period. Total rainfall for the winter was only 6.37 inches, about 1.5 inches below normal. The season's snowfall totaled only 41.2 inches, down more than 30% from the 63.3 inch average. The heaviest single day fall was 3.88 inches on 4 Feb at Oneonta. Rivers remained more or less open all season, tempting water birds to stay in the Region. At lower elevations, there was little if any snow cover most of the winter, creating excellent hunting conditions for predators. An almost nonexistent cone crop was the big negative of the wild food supply and a definite turnoff to the finches. Box alder and ash seeds, a normal second choice for grosbeaks especially, hung from the trees all winter.

Birds responded to these conditions in their usual unpredictable ways. Mild temperatures and open water notwithstanding, no grebes were spotted for the second year since 1981. The Region's first winter appearance of a Double-crested Cormorant was at a Bainbridge backyard creek on 28 Jan. It remained several days, according to Ron Jones. For ducks, the species count of nine was disappointing, but Mallard numbers were outstanding all period. Winter sightings of Snow Goose were the first since 1984. Most unusual were several reports of a single white goose in a flock of up to 150 Canada Goose that overwintered in the Owego area. Jeannette Baldwin, who saw it many times near her home, said it was small and slender like a Snow Goose but she never saw black wing tips. Did other observers note this identifying mark or was it a Snow X Canada hybrid?

A rare Golden Eagle was spotted 25 Jan by an Otsego-Delaware Audubon party at Cannonsville Res. They also counted eight Bald Eagle in the area. Good numbers of hawks were active but only the three more common owl species were reported.

It is often difficult to distinguish between birds that lingered late, those that arrived early and those that never left. But in the latter group, species represented in unusually high winter numbers included Great Blue Heron, Canada Goose, N. Harrier, Ring-billed Gull, N. Flicker, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, E. Bluebird, Am. Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Chipping Sparrow and Purple Finch. Conversely, birds often seen in winter but missed this year included Killdeer, Com. Snipe, Hermit Thrush, Swamp Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak and White-winged Crossbill.

Two rescue missions lent excitement to the season. A Common Loon, according to a *Binghamton Press* story, had mistaken a rain-slicked highway for a waterway and ended in a ditch on 3 Dec. From there it was rescued by a passing motorist, a Broome Community College biology professor, who taxied it to the Chenango River and released it. Steve Rice witnessed the second incident 28 Feb. "Two Wildlife Rehabilitators captured a female Sharp-shinned Hawk, trapped in the Binghamton Post Office," he wrote. "She had chased a starling across the loading ramp, caught the bird but then couldn't get out of the building."

Observers: Cutler & Jeannette Baldwin, Don & Judy Bell, Reynolds Bennett, Les Bemont, Bruce Bozdos, Marilyn Davis, Mary Dobinsky, Sadie Dorber, Polly & Earl Getlein, Spencer Hunt, Hugh Kingery, Gail Kirch, Margaret Layton, Jay Lehman, Andy Mason, Harriet Marsi, Rick Marsi, Ron Milliken, Susan Moran, Marie Petuh, Mike Porter, Steve Rice, Joe Sedlacek, Bill Toner, Eugene Tuch, Don Windsor, Anne Whitaker, Irene Wright, Jane Young.

Abbreviations: BCBC - Binghamton Christmas Bird Count, 29 Dec; CRes - Cannonsville Reservoir; ChCBC - Chenango Christmas Bird Count, 14 Dec; CoCBC - Cortland Christmas Bird Count; JC - Johnson City; TCBC - Tioga Christmas Bird Count 30 Dec; WFC - Waterfowl Count.

LOONS-DUCKS: Com. Loon: *intro*. Double-crested Cormorant: *intro*. Great Blue Heron: record 24 on 5 CBCs; one to three TiOG through period. Snow Goose: one flock TCBC week; arr flock there 20 Feb; three BROO WFC (B&JS). Canada Goose: max 1454 ChCBC. Wood Duck: singles TCBC and BROO 14 Feb (MDv), uncommon. Am. Black Duck: max 197 CRes 3 Jan (SD); 50 BROO 2 Dec, one of six Dec reports; four OTSE 6 Feb, good numbers. Canvasback: only one BROO 2 Dec (HM, BB, GK). Greater Scaup: 25 CoCBC, third report in 16 years. Com. Goldeneye: 30 total TCBC and CCBC; two other Dec reports; 41 at two Susquehanna R sites early Jan; two Feb, good numbers. Bufflehead: one BROO 2 Dec (HM mob); 17 CoCBC; one TiOG Jan (RB), high. Hooded Merganser: eight CoCBC, max of three Dec reports; last BROO early Jan. Com. Merganser: 30 Goodyear L 5 Dec (IW); 175 at four sites early Jan; occasional BROO and TiOG Feb, high.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: Bald Eagle: *intro*. N. Harrier: nine on four CBCs; three others BROO Dec; one OTSE and two DELA Jan, high. Sharp-shinned Hawk: ten on 5 CBCs;

five BROO, OTSE and TIOG Jan; three CHEN and BROO Feb. Cooper's Hawk: regular at two BROO feeders (MP, SR) and one CHEN (SM); a House Finch was known victim; one to four other reports/month. N. Goshawk: only one BROO 26 Dec "beautiful view, fairly low, flying back and forth over the field" (HM). Red-tailed Hawk: mid winter max 11 BROO 29 Jan, while checking previous nest sites (MP, JY). Rough-legged Hawk: 16 on four CBCs; one dark morph BROO 3 Dec; five to seven/month many sites Jan-Feb, high. Golden Eagle: *intro*. Am. Kestrel: five to six/month; male on nest box Binghamton 19 Feb, "pair there last year didn't nest" (SR). Ring-necked Pheasant: four on three CBCs; one CHEN 1 Dec (DW); one at TIOG feeder (AW) through period; encouraging. Ruffed Grouse: "sev" BROO early Dec (JS); 24 on five CBCs; scarce Jan and Feb. Wild Turkey: 275 on four CBCs; midwinter max 120 DELA 27 Jan (AM), still increasing. Am. Coot: two Otsego L 26 Dec (MD); one TIOG Jan (D&JB), fifth year in last 12. Great Black-backed Gull: two CoCBC, only report. Ring-billed Gull: max 73 Delaware-Otsego CBC 14 Dec; "many" CanR Jan, (SD).

PIGEONS-WOODPECKERS: Mourning Dove: record high 1433 on five CBCs. E. Screech-Owl: eight on TCB C and BCBC; one CHEN mid Dec, only reports. Great Horned Owl: six on three CBCs; two BROO on old nest 9 Feb (JS). Barred Owl: two BROO 7 Dec (JS); one BROO late Feb (HM), only reports. Belted Kingfisher: 24 on four CBCs. Red-bellied Woodpecker: max six TCBC; two ChCBC; one Chenango Forks 20 Dec through period (MDv); one Apalachin after 30 Jan (P&EG); two other reports, good numbers. Hairy Woodpecker: 44 on five CBCs, dwindled to three Feb. N. Flicker: ten on three CBCs; three BROO and TIOG Jan, high; none Feb. Pileated Woodpecker: max four CoCBC; two Owego Jan and Feb, low.

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: E. Phoebe: record early arr Owego 23 Feb (SH). Horned Lark: 53 ChCBC max; none Jan; 25 Cornell Farm, CORT 17 Feb (MP); two reports BROO 14 and 26 Feb (MDv), scarce. Am. Crow: widespread comments on high numbers. Tufted Titmouse: 140 on five CBCs; widespread but not as many as last winter. Red-breasted Nuthatch: 22 on five CBCs; regular at up to 10 feeders Dec/Jan, not an irruptive year. Brown Creeper: 19 on four CBCs; up to five/month, low. Carolina Wren: record high 15 BCBC; six TCBC; regular at 20 feeders, six in Binghamton area alone; "spent days at my feeders and nights in my garage" (DW). Golden-crowned Kinglet: 29 on five CBCs; three to four sites/month Jan and Feb. Ruby-crowned Kinglet: three TCBC, only report. E. Bluebird: four TCBC; two sites Jan; many TIOG sightings Feb, one BROO, very early arrivals. Am. Robin: record 112 BCBC; 10 perched JC tree 21 Jan (MP); flocks of up to 24 birds from 11 Feb. N. Mockingbird: 13 on BCBC and TCBC; six sites BROO and TIOG Jan; none Feb; none in n Region, scarce. Cedar Waxwing: 201 on three CBCs; up to 80 birds six to seven sites Jan and Feb; an OTSE flock feasting on crab apples; DELA flock "at summit of Balsam Lake Mt. feeding on Mt. Ash berries" (MPo), good count. N. Shrike: one TCBC; one OTSE 28 Jan and 23 Feb; one BROO late Feb, low.

VIREOS-WARBLED: none.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: N. Cardinal: 235 on five CBCs, second only to last year's record high. Am. Tree Sparrow: 327 on five CBCs, not even half of the 750

counted 10 years ago on the Region's 1981 CBCs, when the editor complained then of the decline from years past! Chipping Sparrow: a record 10 loiterers CoCBC; one Margaretville feeder 2 Jan (MPo). Field Sparrow: one BCBC; one Owego feeder Jan-Feb (C&JB). Song Sparrow: 12 on three CBCs; one banded Binghamton 25 Jan (SR); only two to four/month, scarce. White-throated Sparrow: to 12 a day JC feeder (MP); two other BROO reports; four Norwich Jan-Feb (JL). Dark-eyed Junco: 520 on five CBCs. Snow Bunting: 50 TCBC; five ChCBC; midwinter max 200 Harpersfield DELA 23 Jan (AM); 150 Cherry Valley OTSE 1 Jan (HK); good numbers but few reports. Red-winged Blackbird: gone Dec; arr Binghamton 21 Feb. Rusty Blackbird: arr Milford OTSE 23 Feb, only one. Com. Grackle: four on two CBCs; three sites Jan; arr CHEN 22 Feb. Brown-headed Cowbird: 26 ChCBC; two to three Jan and Feb. Purple Finch: 32 TCBC; one ChCBC: midwinter max 22 Norwich 26 Jan & 29 Feb (JL); one BROO; three OTSE, good. House Finch: 1500 on five CBCs; most abundant feeder visitor. Red Crossbill: only one ChCBC. Com. Redpoll: 40 TCBC; 10 on three other CBCs; no other reports. Pine Siskin: 91 on four CBCs; 10 other Dec reports; up to eight birds on seven Jan reports, mostly CHEN; max 20 Norwich 29 Feb, sparse. Am. Goldfinch: 788 on five CBCs; up to 60/day widespread Jan and Feb. Evening Grosbeak: 375 total on Delaware-Otsego CBC and ChCBC in mid Dec, dropping to only 36 BCBC and TCBCs late Dec; up to 22 birds on scattered reports Jan and Feb, scarce.

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