

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE WINTER SEASON

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The winter 1992-93 began with a taste of recently past winters and ended with the flavor of an old-fashioned winter. December and January were relatively warm and free of snow cover, while February was 4-10°F below normal and with abundant snow in most Regions. A nor'easter hit Regions 9 and 10 on 11-13 Dec, causing significant shoreline damage, but few ornithological reports of note. With the general lack of storms and early cold, Christmas Bird Counts had many good finds and high totals. Given the harsh February, a decline in reports of half-hardy species and a lack of early spring arrivals was not surprising. There were too few comments on the winter food supply to draw general conclusions. The Region 1 report could be used as a model, if other editors have reporters providing such information. You can help your Regional editor by providing similar details for the areas you frequent.

Many bodies of water were open through much of January. This brought widely varying views on water bird impact. Variety generally seemed good in most Regions, and there were many notes of good counts. However, there was some consensus that abundant open water dispersed the birds, reducing totals for the Federation Wildfowl Count. Overall, reports from the waterfowl census seemed good. Loon and grebe reports were typical for the season, with Red-necked Grebe at a few more inland sites, including Region 7, than normal, and Eared Grebe in Regions 1, 2, and 10. Double-crested Cormorant was noted in above average numbers for winter, while Great Cormorant numbers were very high in Regions 9 and 10, especially inland in Region 9, and a straggler reached Region 8. Wintering herons, other than Great Blue Heron, were few, with American Bittern in Regions 2 and 9 and Tricolored Heron and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in Region 10 the rarest. Most waterfowl reports were typical of winter. Species reported in good numbers included Mute Swan, both along the Hudson and in western New York; Snow Goose, widely distributed including Region 7; Northern Pintail, in spite of poor fall numbers; Eurasian Wigeon particularly numerous in Region 10; Ring-necked Duck in Region 6; Greater and Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye and Bufflehead in several Regions; and eiders and Harlequin Duck in Region 10.

Canvasback, Redhead, Oldsquaw, and scoter numbers were low in most Regions. Unusual reports included **Ross's Goose** in Regions 7 and 10; Greater White-fronted Goose in Regions 9 and 10; and a Common Goldeneye x Hooded Merganser hybrid in Region 1. A **Northern Fulmar** in Region 5 and high counts of Razorbill in Region 10 rounded out the water birds catching my attention.

Upstate, Turkey Vulture again wintered in Letchworth State Park and, downstate, Black Vulture was noted in Region 9. Bald Eagle was noted in all Regions, off a bit in numbers in a few. Winter counts were also down a bit for Northern Harrier, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, and American Kestrel in most Regions. Notable raptor reports included Osprey into January and February in Regions 4 and 10, Broad-winged Hawk in Region 9, Golden Eagle nest building in Region 9, Merlin in eight Regions and Peregrine Falcon in five Regions, an invasion of **Gyr Falcon** with reports from Regions 1, 6, 7, and 9 and apparent Peregrine Falcon X Gyr Falcon hybrids in Region 10. You will find a few more reports of the nocturnal raptors than is typical for winter, though numbers were off for the winter invaders, Snowy Owl and Short-eared Owl. There were reports of Common Barn Owl in Regions 9 and 10 and of **Northern Hawk Owl** in Region 7, as well as scattered reports of other typical migrant and resident owl species.

Sandhill Crane added a species to the Region 3 winter roll, and an unidentified crane was in Region 8. Rails were better reported than usual, with Sora, Virginia Rail, and Common Moorhen found in Region 2 by listers pushing for a "Big January." Shorebirds are never a major factor in the winter reports and this season brought few surprises. Most interesting were very late Spotted Sandpiper in Regions 9 and 10; an amazing Ruddy Turnstone count in Region 9; late Dunlin in Regions 1 and 2; Long-billed Dowitcher in Region 10; and American Woodcock displaying in January in Region 10. Of course, in a league by itself was the state's first **Spotted Redshank** wintering in Brooklyn. In contrast, gulls are a group with high winter interest. Generally, finds were below expectations this winter. Little Gull numbers were very low in areas where they normally appear in Regions 1 and 2, Common Black-headed Gull was noted only in Regions 9 and 10; and wintering white-winged gull counts are still below those of a decade or so ago, probably in large part due to landfill closings. Saving the day were good numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull scattered across the state (as a good example, note the effort to identify them to subspecies in Region 9.); a record high

inland count of Great Black-backed Gull in Region 6; Black-legged Kittiwake in Regions 1, 5, 6, and 10. Real gull rarities included **California Gull** in Region 1, **Mew Gull** in Regions 1 and 6, and a first state record for **Slaty-backed Gull** in Region 1. There was also a record late Caspian Tern in Region 2.

Wild Turkey was present in good numbers, doubling the combined totals for Ring-necked Pheasant and Ruffed Grouse in Region 1, though there were notes of concern over the effects of the late, deep snows elsewhere. An amusing account of its flying prowess is in the Region 8 report.

The bulk of the records and trends of interest comes from the passerines, mainly the half-hardy species. The winter incursive groups were virtually nonexistent. There were no big movements of chickadees or nuthatches; only isolated reports of Bohemian Waxwing from Regions 2, 6, and 10; few American Tree Sparrow and longspurs and only fair numbers of Snow Bunting; and very low winter finch numbers. A burst of Red and White-winged Crossbill reports from Regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 added spice to late season birding. Half-hardy species produced a substantial number of interesting records: E. Phoebe in Regions 2, 3, 8, 9, and 10; Western Kingbird in Region 10; good numbers of Tree Swallow in Regions 2 and 10; Common Raven widespread, with outstanding counts in Region 7; good Carolina Wren numbers in many Regions; Marsh Wren in Regions 2 and 10; Ruby-crowned Kinglet in Regions 4, 5, and 10; **Mountain Bluebird** in Region 6; Wood Thrush in Region 10; a big American Robin roost in Region 2; and **Loggerhead Shrike**, now unusual at any season, in both Regions 1 and 9. As usual, warblers were few except in Region 10, but Yellow-rumped and Pine Warblers, Ovenbird, and Common Yellowthroat were found in multiple Regions. A Black-throated Blue Warbler in January was unusual even for Region 10. A very rare Painted Bunting and a Dickcissel were also tallied in Region 10, and the latter also graced Region 8. Sparrows of note included Chipping, Field, and Fox sparrows and Rufous-sided Towhee in four or more Regions; Vesper in Region 10; Savannah in Region 1; Sharp-tailed in Regions 9 and 10; Seaside in Region 10; "Oregon"-type Dark-eyed Junco in Regions 5 and 7; and a very cooperative **Harris's Sparrow** in Region 1. Eastern Meadowlark numbers were up a bit, with reports from five Regions; Rusty Blackbird was noted in Regions 1, 2, 9, and 10 and **Brewer's Blackbird** in Region 7; and Northern Oriole were found in Regions 4 and 9. All in all, this is a

good collection, but not particularly surprising given the weather of the first two-thirds of the season.

Looking back over all these notes, there are many great finds for winter, but the B.O.T.S. Award obviously goes to the very cooperative, long-staying Spotted Redshank in Region 10.

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