

REGION 10 — MARINE

SEYMOUR SCHIFF AND ALVIN WOLLIN

December's weather was mild, but still managed to have four days below 20°F. January was "warm," almost 5° above normal, while February was 2.8° below normal and relatively dry, with just over half its normal precipitation. December was the wet month, with 5.5 inches of rain almost two inches above average. In spite of the warm start to the winter, snow accumulations totaled 12.5 inches in New York City through February. Although this is considerably shy of the normal snowfall of 28.3 inches for this period, we're just not used to seeing snow after the last few winters. January's warm weather may have been responsible for reports of American Woodcock displaying on 21 and 31 Jan.

December's excess of water all seemed to arrive suddenly, coupled with high tides and strong winds. On 11 Dec a major winter storm with sustained 70 mile per hour winds hit the coast of Long Island. It arrived at a full moon high tide, doing considerable damage to the shoreline and caused more destruction to the shore than any single hurricane of recent time. Sand washed away from the beaches along the entire length of the South Shore and parts of the North Shore. The fragile barrier beach at Westhampton Beach's Dune Road was breached in two places. One opening had filled by period's end, but later storms reopened it. The other opening, over a half mile wide at last report, continued to widen, bringing the sea surge and ocean salinity into the inner bay and tidal wetlands. Silting of Fire Island Inlet required that buoys be relocated in the channel. At Shinnecock Inlet some of the fishing fleet can exit their berths only at high tide. Access to Orient Point was unavailable. On Staten Island, the sea broke through the dam and flooded freshwater Wolfe's Pond, leaving the pond to partly drain at low tide. Subsequent "normal" storms during the winter exacerbated these problems. This may mean that some of our birding sites may remain closed or inaccessible for the spring migration. Time will tell what repairs, if any, will be done and what significance this beach alteration will have on wildlife, including the birds.

Many of the Christmas Bird Counts in our area reported increased numbers of species normally present only during the fall and mild winter periods. Also, comments by our contributors and our own

observations suggest that the larger sized species are faring well. An exception is the Herring Gull, which is decreasing as a result of the closing of land fills.

Winter Great Cormorant numbers continued to rise in relation to Double-crested Cormorant. Where the latter once was found 50 to 1, ratios now are more like 2 to 1. In addition, Great Cormorant are seen in more and more areas. This is probably a combination of their increased numbers and more careful observation by birders. Canada Goose numbers also were up, and Brant were plentiful. Unusually large numbers of Wood Duck, typically uncommon in winter, were seen. Eurasian Wigeon, an uncommon winter visitor also was seen in increased numbers this season. Fewer Purple Sandpiper were reported this winter. There were some in Long Beach, but they were missing from the Jones Beach/Point Lookout jetties much of the winter.

The most frequently reported raptor this season (excluding Red-tailed Hawk) was Cooper's Hawk. This speices is probably the most common uninvited bird around feeders. It is especially noticeable because of its proclivity to visit back yards in suburban areas and because of its large size. The smaller raptors (Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Kestrel, Merlin) were less often seen, and remain uncommon to rare. This is in marked contrast to prior years, when Cooper's Hawk was uncommon even on migration. Red-tailed Hawk undoubtedly was the most numerous raptor across the Region, with a total of 57 seen on the Staten Island Christmas Bird Count, mostly at the dump. Henry Flamm and George Bouquio saw 31 there. Flamm noted that "everywhere there was a perch you would find a Red-Tail. No Rough-legged."

No less than *The Wall Street Journal*, in large type, under the Leisure & Arts headline announced "Very Rare Red-Legged Bird Visits Brooklyn Marina". This story was accompanied by a drawing by bird artist John C. Yrizarry of a **Spotted Redshank** drawn from life. John and his wife Mary found the bird on 6 Dec while making a preliminary check of locations prior to the Brooklyn Christmas Bird Count. At the head of a small marina at Knapp Street and Avenue X, eight Greater Yellowlegs shared a winter roost with this rare European straggler. This bird, new to New York State, was seen by hundreds and photographed by many. At the season's end, it was still in its drab Basic plumage. This season's other star was a **Bohemian Waxwing** found by Pat Jones and Peter Joost in a flock of Cedar Waxwing at Tackapausha Preserve in Wantagh on the

Southern Nassau Christmas Bird Count on 3 Jan. It stayed to 7 Jan. A female **Painted Bunting** was found at the Montauk dump on the Montauk Christmas Bird Count on 19 Dec by Andy Baldelli and David Mizrahi, and remained until 28 Dec. On 7 Feb, your editors carefully studied a winter loon in the ocean at Tobay which was neither Common nor Red-throated. We could not determine if it was an **Arctic** or a **Pacific Loon**. The bird had a clear white face, the proper shape and tilt of bill, and a straight but not sharp line of demarcation between the white neck in front and the dark neck behind. It did have a white flank patch which is supposed to be diagnostic of Arctic Loon. No chin strap was visible. As a group these birds are variable and the literature is not clear. Caution is advised in their identification afield.

In the Fall report we discussed our unease with various Gyrfalcon sightings in the last few years. On 15 Feb, a gray Gyrfalcon was reported at Jones Beach West End. On 28 Feb the editors and Manny Levine closely studied a pair of very large pale gray falcons flying about and roosting on the Jones Beach water tower. These birds were not the resident Peregrine Falcon pair, which consists of a small male and a very dark, very large female. The dark black hood of these birds contrasted with the pale body. The birds were seemed to be some kind of Peregrine Falcon, but matched no known race. A subsequent study of the extensive falcon collection at the American Museum of Natural History by Levine failed to shed any light on the subject. We suspect that these birds were a Peregrine Falcon X Gyrfalcon cross.

A note from Janet Gillen, Queens Ranger, indicated that a pair of Great Horned Owl may be nesting within Forest Park, in Queens. If so, this will be an extension of range westward from the time of the Atlas period. This pair wintered there this season, also a recent first (reported from 13 Dec by Robert Schulz). Almost all sites within the Region which have resident Great Horned Owl also have resident Eastern Screech-Owl, but the latter has not yet been reported from Forest Park.

Contributors: Howard Boltson, Jean Bourque, Thomas W. Burke, Ralph Cioffi, James Clinton, Sr., Henry F. Flamm, Lester Feldman, John J. Fritz, Janet Gillen, Paul H. Gillen, Anthony J. Lauro, Emanuel Levine, Peter Martin, David Mizrahi, Joan Quinlan, Herbert H. Roth, John J. Ruscica, Barbara Scherzin, Seymour Schiff, Lore J. Schore, Robert Schulz, Steve Walter, Alvin Wollin, John Yrizarry.

Abbreviations: BCBC – Brooklyn CBC, 19 Dec; CB – Cedar Beach; CRSP – Connetquot River SP; CSCBC – Central Suffolk CBC, 27 Dec; New York State; FBF – Floyd Bennett Field; FP – Forest Park, Queens;

HLSP – Hempstead Lake SP; HPd – Hook Pond, Easthampton; JBWR – Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge; JFKWS – John F. Kennedy Wildlife Sanctuary (Tobay); JBCH – Jones Beach; JBWE – Jones Beach West End; MCBC – Montauk CBC, 19 Dec; MPt – Montauk Point; NYRBA – New York Rare Bird Alert; NNCBC – Northern Nassau CBC, 26 Dec; OCBC – Orient CBC, 2 Jan; QWCBC – Quogue-Watermill CBC, 19 Dec; QCBC – Queens CBC, 19 Dec; RMSP – Robert Moses State Park; ShIn – Shinnecock Inlet; SNCBC – South Nassau CBC, 3 Jan; SICBC – Staten Island CBC, 19 Dec.

Winter reports: PACIFIC/ARCTIC LOON: *intro*. **Red-necked Grebe:** one MPt mid Dec-late Jan, four MCBC, one Pt Lookout 17 Jan (NYRBA), . **EARED GREBE:** one MCBC (Paul Buckley), persisted to 1 Jan. **N. Gannet:** 4000+ MPt 5 Dec (NYRBA). **Great Egret:** overwintered at several locations. **Tricolored Heron:** one Quogue 3–27 Dec (NYRBA), one Island P 21 Jan (EL, LF). **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron:** last SNCBC. **Tundra Swan:** two wintered HPd (mob), one Island P 21 Jan (EL, LF). **Mute Swan:** increased sightings Staten I (HF). **Greater White-fronted Goose:** imm Calverton 12 Jan (JR) moved to Grumman 16–31 Jan. **Snow Goose:** four NNCBC, one blue morph Yaphank 3 Dec (JR), CSCBC, four OCBC. **Ross's GOOSE:** one Short Pd, Watermill 30 Jan (AL) to 1 Feb. **Green-winged Teal:** one Eurasian race JBWR (BCBC). **Blue-winged Teal:** one SNCBC, one Deep Hole Creek, Cutchogue 23 Jan–28 Feb. **Tufted Duck:** one wintered Calverton (JC), pair at Grumman moved to Calverton mid-Jan to mid-Feb. **Com. Eider:** 750 MPt 5 Dec, 1000 there 12 Jan, 750 on 17 Jan, large numbers all winter. **King Eider:** four MPt 5 Dec, two MCBC, one PT 6 Jan, three–five MPt 17–20 Jan. **Harlequin Duck:** group wintered PT/Jones Inlet, max 13 on 10 Feb. **Oldsquaw:** much more numerous this season JBCH. **Barrow's Goldeneye:** female wintered Throgs Neck Bridge (SW), female Moriches 17 Jan (JC).

Osprey: one BCBC, late. **Bald Eagle:** one BCBC, two Gardiner's I 19 Dec, imm Beaver Lake, Mill Neck 1 Feb (Helen McClure). **N. Goshawk:** a few reports. **Red-tailed Hawk:** *intro*. **Rough-legged Hawk:** singles JFKWS 8 Dec (JF, JQ), Zachs Bay 10 Jan, Three Mile Harbor; none at FBF (JB). **Peregrine Falcon:** *intro*, one at LILCO stacks in Northport in Jan; a pair wintered at the JBCH water tower. **N. Bobwhite:** 12 QWCBC, 148 CSCBC, 23 OCBC. **Clapper Rail:** one Cow Meadow 7 Jan (PM). **Virginia Rail:** one SICBC, two NNCBC, two CSCBC. **Sora:** one ShIn 6 Feb (NYRBA). **Semipalmated Plover:** one CB 1 Dec (JQ), 12 NNCBC, two Bay P 20 Feb (Matt Bayer). **Am. Oystercatcher:** one SNCBC at Zachs

Bay. **Greater Yellowlegs:** *intro*, others also overwintered. **SPOTTED REDSHANK:** *intro*. **Spotted Sandpiper:** one Massapequa pds 18 Jan (JF), very late. **Purple Sandpiper:** a few on the jetties at Rockaway and at Jones Inlet, less common than usual. **Long-billed Dowitcher:** seven SNCBC. **Am. Woodcock:** *intro*. **Laughing Gull:** one Tappan Beach 13 Dec (HR), one SICBC, one NNCBC 26 Dec, three CSCBC 27 Dec. **Little Gull:** one ShIn 6 Dec (NYRBA). **Com. Black-headed Gull:** one Bridgehampton Mall 23 Jan–28 Feb (mob). **Herring Gull:** *intro*. **Iceland Gull:** a half dozen wintered, mostly in eastern SUFF. **Lesser Black-backed Gull:** one SICBC, first count record; three MCBC, one HLSP 31 Jan, one HPd 31 Jan, one wintered Dosoris Pd, Glen Cove. **Glaucous Gull:** one Star I, Montauk 12 Dec (JF), one Bridgehampton 24 Jan, one HPd 30 Jan (NYRBA). **Black-legged Kittiwake:** one MPt 12 Dec (JQ), a few others. **Black Skimmer:** two Canarsie Pier, Brooklyn (BCBC). **COM. MURRE:** one MPt 2 Jan (NYRBA), eight oiled birds treated by Okeanos early Jan. **Razorbill:** 30 MPt 12 Dec, various sightings there to 14 Feb; 250+ seen going NE into Block I Sound (AL, mob).

Barn Owl: max eleven BCBC. **E. Screech-Owl:** albino in Laurel Hollow (HB). **Great Horned Owl:** *intro*. **Snowy Owl:** one Democrat Point 20 Dec, one overwintered Staten I, two overwintered Breezy Pt, one–two CB 1 Dec–mid Jan, one–two JBWE 5 Dec–15 Feb, one overwintered Shinnecock, one JBWR 24 Jan–28 Feb (MOB). **Long-eared Owl:** singles FBF entire period (JB), SNCBC, JFKWS 4 Feb (PM). **Short-eared Owl:** missing from FBF first time in 12 years (JB), scarce elsewhere, almost all reports JBWE. **N. Saw-whet Owl:** a few reports. **Red-headed Woodpecker:** one overwintered Central P, one BCBC at Dyker P. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker:** a few reports.

E. Phoebe: singles BCBC, MCBC, NNCBC, OCBC, SICBC, SNCBC, five CSCBC, several overwintered. **W. Kingbird:** one RMSP 1–6 Dec (JQ, mob), one CB 9 Dec, one BCBC at Ft Tilden. **Tree Swallow:** 13 MCBC, four CSCBC. **Fish Crow:** outnumbered Am. Crow on the Staten I dump 5:1 (HF). **House Wren:** one MCBC, two BCBC. **Marsh Wren:** one NNCBC, two CSCBC. **Golden-crowned Kinglet:** 107 CSCBC, 53 OCBC, more than usual. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** a few reported. **E. Bluebird:** overwintered Suff. **Wood Thrush:** one Central P 28 Jan–6 Feb (Tom Fiore, mob), very late. **Am. Robin:** more than usual. **Brown Thrasher:** one QWCBC. **Am. Pipit:** one QCBC. **BOHEMIAN WAXWING:** *intro*.

Solitary Vireo: one Pelham Bay P 6 Dec (NYRBA). **Orange-crowned Warbler:** one Prospect P 13 Dec, two SNCBC. **BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER:** one OCBC (Myrna Hemmerick). **Yellow-rumped Warbler:**

exceptionally large numbers throughout the Region, in flocks on lawns at beach sites. **Pine Warbler:** one CRSP 20 Dec (JQ), one CSCBC, one SNCBC. **Palm Warbler:** two QWCBC. **Com. Yellowthroat:** one SNCBC. **Yellow-breasted Chat:** one Smithtown 8 Dec; singles BCBC, MCBC, SNCBC; one wintered at the entrance to JBWR (mob).

PAINTED BUNTING: *intro.* **Dickcissel:** one overwintered at feeder Pt Lookout (mob). **Chipping Sparrow:** two MCBC, singles QWCBC, NNCBC, CSCBC. **Vesper Sparrow:** two BCBC. **Sharp-tailed Sparrow:** one SICBC, first count record since 1953; two QWCBC, 14 CSCBC, SNCBC. **Seaside Sparrow:** one QWCBC, one CSCBC. **Fox Sparrow:** a few reported. **Lapland Longspur:** one CB 5-9 Dec, two MCBC, two Fire I 14 Feb, two JBWE 16-28 Feb (NYRBA). **Snow Bunting:** fewer than usual. **E. Meadowlark:** some wintered. **Rusty Blackbird:** three QCBC, two NNCBC, three CSCBC, SNCBC. **Boat-tailed Grackle:** record max 499 QCBC; 300 flying to a roost in Jamaica Bay 28 Jan (NYRBA). **Com. Grackle:** 1000+ Yaphank 2 Dec (JR), five QWCBC, 732 CSCBC, SNCBC, flock Alley Pd P late Jan (SW). **Purple Finch:** 12 NNCBC, ten CSCBC, two OCBC. **Red Crossbill:** two CB 8 Dec (NYRBA), 30 Pt Lookout 13 Jan (EL). **Pine Siskin:** one JBCH 5 Dec. two CB 8 Dec, one QCBC (NYRBA), one OCBC.

603 Mead Terrace, South Hempstead, New York 11550