

REGION 4 — SUSQUEHANNA

MARY DOBINSKY

Until February it seemed that the winter of 1992-1993 would be our sixth consecutive mild, open winter. However, the double blast of heavy snowfalls and icy temperatures swept "ol' Man Winter" to power 1 Feb. He continued to reign the entire month, and well beyond as later records will show. December, contrary to most months of 1992, was warmer than normal. The average daily high of 34°F was 1.4° over the average. Precipitation totaled 2.97 inches, a trace above normal. Snowfall of 18.8 inches in Binghamton was an inch more than usual. A selective storm dumped up to 9.5 inches of snow on northern areas of the Region on 11 Dec, but that snow melted quickly. January also was a warm month, about 4.0°F above normal. Precipitation of 2.08 inches was about a third inch below average. Only 11.4 inches of snow fell during the month, 8 inches below average. February was frigid! In Binghamton, the mean temperature of 18.6°F was about 4° colder than normal, while in Cooperstown the mean was 7.3° below normal, according to national weather service reports. Most days were below freezing and subzero nights were common, with 13 in Cooperstown and 12 in Walton. Snowfall at Binghamton Airport measured 31.6 inches, almost double the norm, and was the most snow for February since 1972. Heavy snow cover persisted through the month.

Rivers were mostly wide open December and January. As a result, a total of 16 waterfowl species, the highest number since 1985, was found. Yet the annual waterfowl count early January was low. One participant believed that many ducks escaped detection because they were able to spread out in open water. They weren't concentrated at good observation points and frequented sites too far from the road to be seen. In February, the problem became finding open water.

Except for a scarcity of Am. Kestrel, hawks were seen in average to good numbers. An Osprey, a rare winter visitor, was spotted by George and Evelyn Mead along the Susquehanna River west of Owego on 7 Jan and 5 Feb and was also reported to the Tioga Bird Club by a pair of area fishermen. Eastern Screech-Owl behavior was noted by three observers. Edna Hawken reported one roosting in her son's Vestal roadside mail box (from which the door had been knocked off) on 17 Feb, but it was gone the next day. On a sad note, Jeannette Baldwin and Paul Worden each found a dead Eastern Screech-Owl in the trees in their TIOG yards. "Both birds had just the heads gone," wrote Jeannette.

"We live about eight miles apart and wonder if Great Horned Owls have done this." Rick and Harriet Marsi fittingly ushered in the New Year by tracking down a Snowy Owl. They acted on a tip from one of Rick's readers and found the bird at dusk on a telephone pole on Mt Hunger Road between Lisle and Nanticoke. The bird shifted twice "spreading out these enormous white wings...finally letting us approach as close as we wished," wrote Harriet. She returned the next day with three other observers and found "him/her but definitely an immature hunkered down against the blowing snow on a one-story house roof, so well camouflaged."

Numbers of half-hardy species such as Northern Mockingbird and Northern Cardinal were down. Carolina Wren, however, may have the secret for survival in a harsh winter. For them, a reliable suet feeder is the basic requirement. A sheltered roosting site at a building close by may be the second concern. Marilyn Davis had a pair spending nights in an old phoebe nest on her front porch. "Somehow they knocked the nest down 13 Dec and just flew off," said Marilyn. Garages were home to two pairs reported through last winter. Bob Saunders had even more interesting guests. His story read "Two wrens nested late last summer in a plastic juice container on the beam of our carport roof. Mid September young were practicing flying around the yard. Then they all disappeared. In January a pair arrived at our suet feeder. Now they feed daily and roost in the same juice container. Could they be the parents or the young?" he asks.

In addition to Osprey, reports of other summer residents seldom here in winter included Killdeer, Eastern Phoebe, Gray Catbird, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Field Sparrow and Northern Oriole. Common Raven is still not at all common in our Region, so four at one sighting is impressive. Good sparrow counts were noted right through our severe February. Lapland Longspur, the first in five years, was reported. Missed species included Snow Goose, Common Snipe, and Swamp Sparrow.

Purple Finch and crossbills highlighted winter finch news. The 201 Purple Finch on five CBCs was the highest total in 10 years. They continued to be seen in small flocks all season, especially after mid February. Red Crossbill was found 11 Feb by Dave Messineo and the rarer White-winged Crossbill appeared on 22 Feb, both in the Otselic and Pharsalia areas of CHEN. This was the scene of the big incursion and confirmed nestings of the two species in 1985. According to Dave, single males and pairs of Red Crossbill were feeding in Pitch and Red Pine while small groups of White-winged Crossbill were in Norway Spruce. Males of both species were singing territorial songs and all were still

there at the end of the period. Despite abundant cones and tree seeds, other winter finches were almost nonexistent.

Region 4 will miss Judy and Don Bell, who have moved to Minnesota. Judy is a licensed bander and Don compiled records for the Tioga Bird Club

Observers: Cutler & Jeannette Baldwin, Les Bemont, Reynolds Bennett, Bruce Bozdos, Marilyn Davis (MDv), Mary Dobinsky, Sadie Dorber, John Gustafson, Sara Kinch, Gail Kirch, Margaret Layton, Harriet Marsi, Rick Marsi, Andy Mason, Robert Miller, Ron Milliken, Susan Moran, Marie Petuh, Mike Porter (MPo), Steve Rice, Bob and Jean Saunders, Joe Sedlacek, Tom & Norene Tasber, Bill Toner, Norm Trigoboff, George Wade, Anne Whitaker, Don Windsor, Irene Wright.

Abbreviations: BCBC - Binghamton Christmas Bird Count, 27 Dec; CanRes - Cannonsville Reservoir; ChCBC - Chenango Christmas Bird Count, 19 Dec; CoCBC - Cortland Christmas Bird Count, 2 Jan; DOCBC - Delaware-Otsego Christmas Bird Count 19 Dec; FWC - Federation Waterfowl Count; OPM - Oneonta, Portlandville, Milford; TCBC - Tioga Christmas Bird Count, 1 Jan; WPRes - Whitney Point Reservoir.

Winter reports: **Com. Loon:** one BCBC 27 Dec; one Chenango Bridge 18 Jan (SM), rare after Dec. **Pied-billed Grebe:** one Susquehanna R Oneonta 21 Jan (MD), first in four winters. **Great Blue Heron:** 15 on four CBCs; four OTSE 17 Jan; only one TIOG Feb. **Canada Goose:** max 1915 ChCBC; 783 CanRes 16 Jan (EH); 405 Otsego L 17 Jan (AM); only TIOG Feb. **Wood Duck:** one Dings Hollow Road BROO through 5 Feb (MDv); two other singles BROO Jan; one TIOG, uncommon. **Am. Black Duck:** 167 on five CBCs; fewer CanRes all season; at Oneonta and Chenango Forks all season, max eight; mixed flock of 400 (including Mallard) in cornfield near Homer 10 and 11 Dec (JG). **Mallard:** max 1743 on five CBCs, high; 504 FWC, scarce after early Feb. **N. Pintail:** one CanRes 16 Jan (EH), first in eight winters. **Canvasback:** TIOG Feb (RB), only report. **Redhead:** 12 CoCBC, good numbers. **Ring-necked Duck:** max 19 CoCBC; one BCBC; one CanRes 7 Feb. **Greater Scaup:** CoCBC only report. **Scaup species:** WPRes 29 Jan (HM, BB). **Com. Goldeneye:** 103 CoCBC, high; one Vestal 26 Dec; five FWC, scarce but present through Feb. **Bufflehead:** eight CoCBC, scarce. **Hooded Merganser:** max 22 CoCBC; six ChCBC; two FWC, highest count in 15 years. **Com. Merganser:** 154 on four CBCs and FWC, high. **Red-breasted Merganser:** single TIOG Jan (GW, NK), often missed.

Bald Eagle: max nine CanRes 7 Feb. **N. Harrier:** max six on three CBCs; two Sidney 18 Jan (R&JS). **Sharp-shinned Hawk:** seven on three CBCs; one took House Finch at Vestal feeder (RM); three-four/month widespread through period. **Cooper's Hawk:** 13 on five CBCs; regular at feeders, "got a squirrel" 9 Dec; "missed a Mourning Dove 8 Jan" (MP); "wish I could be sure it has been the same one for four years" (SR). **N. Goshawk:** singles DELA 2 Dec (AM); ChCBC; Tiog 7 Feb (C&JB), good count. **Red-tailed Hawk:** 80 on five CBCs; 10 Susquehanna R 17 Jan; 26 Tioga to CanRes 7 Feb, high counts. **Rough-legged Hawk:** 25 on five CBCs; eight widespread reports Jan, max four; six Feb, best counts CHEN. **Ring-necked Pheasant:** three widespread reports/month, good. **Ruffed Grouse:** male displaying Oneonta Res 1 Dec; max five BROO 5 Dec (JS); one eating buds in cherry tree 16 Feb (T&NT); only nine on four CBCs, scarce. **Wild Turkey:** 154 on four CBCs, mostly CHEN, OTSE; scarce Jan-Feb. **Killdeer:** single CanRes 16 Jan (EH), late. **Ring-billed Gull:** 59 on five CBCs, good. **Herring Gull:** 74 on four CBCs, high. **Great Black-backed Gull:** one CoCBC, uncommon.

E. Screech-Owl: *intro.* **Great Horned Owl:** 19 on three CBCs, high. **Snowy Owl:** *intro.* **Barred Owl:** one Triangle 2, 3 and 17 Feb (T&NT), only report. **N. Saw-whet Owl:** heard BROO last week Feb (RM). **Belted Kingfisher:** 17 four CBCs, good; only one Feb report. **Red-bellied Woodpecker:** record nine TCBC and good numbers there through period; also three ChCBC, uncommon that area. **N. Flicker:** singles BCBC, DOCBC; also on telephone pole BROO 4 and 14 Jan (MP), scarce. **Pileated Woodpecker:** five-six reports/month; max six BCBC, high counts.

E. Phoebe: one Vestal 4, 13 and 19 Dec (GK); one Tiog 31 Dec and 1 Jan (GW), very late. **Horned Lark:** max 75 Chen 20 Jan (EH); Willet 9 Dec and 5 Feb (MDv); 50 WPRes 8 Feb (HM, BB, GK), rather low. **Am. Crow:** max 2,039 TCBC, a third of the total count. **Com. Raven:** four Franklin Mt Hawk Watch s Oneonta 6 Dec (AM). **Tufted Titmouse:** 114 on four CBCs, decline second year in a row. **Red-breasted Nuthatch:** 55 on five CBCs; low feeder counts through period. **Brown Creeper:** 24 on four CBCs; scarce Jan-Feb. **Carolina Wren:** *intro.* **Winter Wren:** one CHEN mid Dec, often missed. **Golden-crowned Kinglet:** 36 on five CBCs. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet:** one Margaretville feeder 15 Dec (MPo), uncommon. **E. Bluebird:** max 10 BCBC; five CanRes 16 Jan; four Waterman Center 27 Feb. **Hermit Thrush:** arr "feeding multiflora rose bushes" T Maine BROO 27 Feb (JS). **Am. Robin:** 30 on five CBCs; flocks to 30 at five sites, mostly BROO, through period. **Gray Catbird:** one feeding in rose bushes Tompkins DELA 16 Jan (Broome Naturalists Club), rare. **Cedar**

Waxwing: max 508 on four CBCs, high count; fewer midwinter flocks. **N. Shrike:** max two DOCBC; singles CanRes 8 Jan (MP), WPres 15 Jan (HM), N. Pharsalia 28 Feb (DM), scarce.

Am. Tree Sparrow: 301 on five CBCs; good mid winter counts, max 30 OPM 5 Feb. **Field Sparrow:** one Owego feeder through period (C&JB), uncommon. **Fox Sparrow:** arr Vestal 19 Feb (SD), very early. **Song Sparrow:** 26 on three CBCs; four singles/month Jan-Feb, good. **White-throated Sparrow:** 60 on five CBCs; at six widespread feeders through period; max 28 BROO 23 Feb (MP), highest numbers since 1985. **Dark-eyed Junco:** 556 on five CBCs; mid winter max 100 CanRes 15 Jan (EH), high. **Lapland Longspur:** two CHEN 20 Jan (Elva Hawken). **Snow Bunting:** max 60 McGraw 6 Dec (BT); 106 on three CBCs; three other Jan reports. **Red-winged Blackbird:** two singles early Dec; arr BROO 20 Feb, only reports. **Com. Grackle:** four singles. **Brown-headed Cowbird:** max three DOCBC, scarce. **N. Oriole:** one Kirkwood 10 Jan (LB), first since 1989. **Purple Finch:** *intro*. **House Finch:** 1641 on four CBCs. **Com. Redpoll:** four DOCBC; one CoCBC, scarce. **Red Crossbill:** *intro*. **White-winged Crossbill:** *intro*. **Pine Siskin:** max 22 ChCBC; one DOCBC; one BROO 5 Dec; one TiOG Jan, scarce. **Am. Goldfinch:** 683 on five CBCs; 200 CanRes 16 Jan; fewer at feeders. **Evening Grosbeak:** 42 ChCBC; one TCBC, scarce.

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