

REGION 8 — HUDSON-MOHAWK

ALAN MAPES

The season did a flip flop from much warmer than usual to much colder this winter. Warm temperatures kept water open through most of December and January. December was 3.3°F above normal and January full 6°F above. The change came in February, which ran 5.2°F below normal. Precipitation was about normal in December and January, but with less snow than usual. On 13 Jan, however, an 11 inch snowfall was the single heaviest storm dating back to February 1988, and was a sign of things to come. February was the fifth snowiest on record, with 28.6 inches recorded at Albany, more than twice the norm. A dramatic freeze of water bodies pushed waterfowl south.

The cold weather did not bring winter finches to the area, though. Purple finches were fairly numerous, but there was an almost complete lack of other irruptive migrants. Purple Finch was widespread, with several flocks of 20-30 birds at Jefferson throughout the period. House Finch was scarce in Yunick's Schenectady yard and absent most of period, and low numbers (6-8) frequented Five Rivers Center feeders where there are usually 20-40 present. Similar comments came from ten Dial-a-bird reports. Evening Grosbeak was almost entirely absent.

Helped by the warm early season, the Catskill-Coxsackie Christmas Bird Count tallied 82 species on 17 Dec, a record high number despite rain falling most of the day. Lots of open water yielded 19 species of waterfowl for the count. Other CBCs recorded average to above average numbers of species.

Northern Harrier was scarce at the Five Rivers Center, where it is regular during most winters. It was a good winter for raptors in the area of farm fields east of Fort Edward. A single Snowy Owl was present during the period, and was observed chasing a Rock Dove and catching it in the air with no difficulty. The observers on a 7 Feb field trip led by this reporter were treated to a spectacle of raptor behavior for the next 45 minutes. After making its kill, the owl immediately was chased by a dark morph Rough-legged Hawk, and the two birds flew out of sight. They were relocated quickly, but by then the owl had lost the dove to a Red-tailed Hawk. As the Red-tailed Hawk fed on the ground, the owl repeatedly flew off his perch on a dead stub, each time making a low pass over the hawk and continuing on to harass the Rough-legged Hawk, which was perched on a nearby fence post. The Red-tailed Hawk

stood his ground and eventually flew off after eating its fill. The owl pursued as it left. To the watchers' surprise, the owl could easily overtake either hawk in the air, and showed itself to be a very competent flier.

Yunick reported that open water on the rivers favored gulls as well as waterfowl. At Lock 7 of the Mohawk River and the Niskayuna Landfill, gull numbers were the highest in his long experience.

It was a slow, disappointing winter at feeders in Schenectady and Jenny Lake, as observed by Robert Yunick. Wintering populations of feeder birds such as Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches were lower than average. Wintering American Robins were abundant at some locations during the mild weather of December and January. A night roosting area of young conifer trees at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar had not its usual 50 or so robins, but a noisy group of 3300 which appeared every evening though the last week in December. The flock then left the location entirely. On a Schenectady industrial plant lawn, feeding robins increased through December and January to a total of 200 on 29 Jan, and declined thereafter, with 35 on 12 Feb. However, there was not a repeat of the widespread reports of robins on suburban lawns that were received the previous winter. Finches were scarce.

While at the Tomhannock Reservoir on 6 Dec, Able, Ellison and Martin observed a Wild Turkey attempt to fly across the reservoir, a distance of over 1/2 mile. The bird ran out of steam before reaching the far shore, however, and splashed down in the water. It then swam to shore and walked out of the water.

Several very unusual species were reported this season. A first for the Region was an immature **Great Cormorant** seen on the Hudson River during the Catskill-Coxsackie Christmas Bird Count on 17 Dec and again a short distance up the river on 26 Dec. On 1 Jan an immature was seen on the Mohawk River near the Colonie landfill. Presumably a single bird had worked its way north. An immature **King Eider** was found with a flock of goldeneye on the Tomhannock Reservoir on 6 Dec. An adult male **Barrow's Goldeneye** was present on Saratoga Lake during December with a flock of Common Goldeneye. It was last seen on 20 Dec during the Saratoga Springs Christmas Bird Count. A **crane** of uncertain species was seen near Germantown on 4 Dec by Berna Lincoln. This report raised speculation that the escaped Common Crane seen the past winter in that area might have returned. On 17 Jan Owen and Carol Whitby observed a crane in that same area, flying and feeding. They tentatively identified it as a Sandhill Crane. Poor light and long distance kept them from seeing positive field marks for the species. Two

experienced birders, Bill Lee and Robert Yunick, walking the bike path in Niskayuna on 13 Dec heard a bird call which had all the attributes of Carolina Chickadee. The bird was in the company of two Black-capped Chickadee but stayed hidden in brush and was never seen. Yunick is especially familiar with this species from his banding work in New Jersey and West Virginia. Several return visits to the area failed to turn up the bird. While in COLU scouting for an upcoming Christmas bird count, Ken Able and party found an **Orange-crowned Warbler**. The bird was seen 15 and 16 Dec, but could not be relocated for the count the following day. A female **Dickcissel** was seen regularly at a Ghent feeding station from 25 Dec to 2 Jan. The bird fed on the ground with sparrows and juncos, and would usually continue to feed steadily when the other birds spooked and flew off. A European Goldfinch of unknown origin frequented a feeder near Schuylerville from 13 to 17 Jan, reported by Barb Putnam. One wintered at a feeder near Albany the previous winter.

Contributors: Ken Able, Alan Devoe Bird Club monthly sighting reports (ADBC), Dial-a-Bird RBA (DAB), Bob Boehm, Tim Colborn, Paul Connor, Walter Ellison, Richard Guthrie; Bill Graham, Gale Halm, Bill Lee, A. Mapes (AAM); Andrew Mason (AM); Nancy Martin, Laura Meade, Dave Nelson, Ray Perry, Barb Putnam, Alice Ross, Paul Saffold, Owen Whitby.

Abbreviations: ACCBC - Albany County Christmas Bird Count, 20 Dec; CCCBC - Catskill-Coxsackie Christmas Bird Count, 17 Dec; FiveR - Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Delmar; L7/NL - Lock 7 and Niskayuna Landfill; SaraL - Saratoga Lake; TomRes - Tomhannock Reservoir; SCBC - Schenectady Christmas Bird Count, 19 Dec; SSCBC - Saratoga Springs Christmas Bird Count, 20 Dec.

Winter reports: **Com. Loon:** last Lock 7 Mohawk R SCHE 16 Jan. **Pied-billed Grebe:** two reports, one SaraL 6 Dec (NM), last Hudson R SRCCBC 27 Dec. **Horned Grebe:** one Hudson R Germantown RENS 18 Jan (ADBC) only report. **GREAT CORMORANT:** *intro* (NYSARC). **Double-crested Cormorant:** last Lock 7 SCBC, only report. **Mute Swan:** 123 Hudson R CCCBC, dramatic jump in wintering numbers. **Snow Goose:** max 150 Niskayuna 5 Dec (BL), last Hudson R 17 Jan (ADBC). **Brant:** 24 Fox Creek SCHO 13 Dec (BB) only report. **Canada Goose:** max 2000 TomR 13 Dec (TC). **Wood Duck:** one Hudson R near Fort Miller 9 Jan (DB), two ALBA 23 Jan (RG) apparently wintering. **N. Shoveler:** last two SaraL 6 Dec (NM). **Gadwall:** last two Round L 6 Dec (NM). **Canvasback:** Hudson R at Germantown COLU 18 Jan and 27 Feb (ADBC). **Redhead:** one Hudson R COLU 2 Jan (ADBC). **Lesser Scaup:** max 14 SaraL 6 Dec (NM). **KING EIDER:** *intro*. **Oldsquaw:** last Rexford

SCBC. **White-winged Scoter**: one SaraL 6 Dec (NM) only report. **Com. Goldeneye**: max 65 SaraL 6 Dec (NM). **BARROW'S GOLDENEYE**: *intro*. **Hooded Merganser**: max 50 Alcove Res ACCBC, last Hudson R at Gansevoort SARA 14 Feb (BP). **Com. Merganser**: max 190 Round L Sara 6 Dec (NM). **Ruddy Duck**: one TomRes 13 Dec (TC), last FiveR 14 Jan (AAM), first record for the site.

Bald Eagle: 20 reports, wintering in increasing numbers on Hudson R and Mohawk R; max three (one ad, two imm) SaraL 18 Dec (RP). **N. Harrier**: max seven Fort Edward 24 Dec (BP), disappeared when deep snow cover arrived second week of Feb (BP). **N. Goshawk**: two reports, one Jefferson 16 Jan (AM), imm Peebles I ALBA 1 Jan (NM). **Red-shouldered Hawk**: one ACCBC; one Saratoga SP 13 Jan (GH), wintered for the second consecutive year. **Red-tailed Hawk**: scarce Niskayuna (RY). **Rough-legged Hawk**: lower numbers than average, very few in SCHO and MONT farm lands (BB), max six Fort Edward 30 Jan (NM). **Merlin**: two reports, one Colonie 6 Dec (NM), one Fort Edward Feb 7 (AAM). **Wild Turkey**: max 50 Gallupville on several occasions during Feb (BB); *intro*. **Crane species**: *intro*. **Am. Woodcock**: one CCCBC only report. **Ring-billed Gull**: max 500 L7/NL 5 Dec (RY), declined sharply to 2 by 19 Dec, none thereafter. **Herring Gull**: record numbers during fall L7/NL (RY), max 2500 5 Dec, 1540 10 Jan, 1700 31 Jan, dwindled to 150 on 28 Feb. **Iceland Gull**: ten reports, Hudson R, Mohawk R, Moreau landfill SARA. **Lesser Black-backed Gull**: third year TomRes 6 Dec (NM); one ad, one first year, one second year Mohawk R ALBA 9 Dec (KA); ad Mohawk R Cohoes 1 Jan (NM); one Hudson R GREE 23 Jan (RG), one Cohoes 27 Feb (BL). **Glaucous Gull**: five reports 4 Dec-23 Jan.

Mourning Dove: unusually large numbers at feeders in Gallupville, same reported by other feeders operators in the area (BB). **Snowy Owl**: one Albany 12 Dec (DAB) seen taking a pigeon; one Fort Edward 16 Jan to end of period (mob), *intro*. **Great Gray Owl**: one WASH 4 Dec (GH) unverified. **Long-eared Owl**: two reports, one SCBC, one Gallupville 9 Feb (BB). **Short-eared Owl**: 6-15 Fort Edward after 21 Dec, max 15 on 7 Feb (AAM, mob). **N. Saw-whet Owl**: three reports, one Knox ALBA 21 Feb (DN), one Stuyvesant 17 Dec, one Niskayuna 19 Dec. **Belted Kingfisher**: 15 reports, present to through freeze up in Feb. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**: increasing number of reports from CBCs. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**: only reports one ACCBC, one Coxsackie 28 Feb (NM).

E. Phoebe: one CCCBC, last Becker Corners SCHO 10 Jan (BB). **Horned Lark**: relatively plentiful for the period, max 78 Florida Mont 20 Feb (NM). **Blue Jay**: scarce, only three found on SCBC. **Fish Crow**: one to five throughout the period at L7/NLF and in Schenectady (RY), max 50

Mohawk R Waterford 27 Feb (BL). **Com. Raven**: four reports. **E. Bluebird**: wintering in increasing numbers, 104 CCCBC, 109 ACCBC; 30 Silver Bay 3-4 Feb (LM) very early migrants? **Am. Robin**: abundant during mild weather Dec- Jan, 3300 FiveR 20 Dec; *intro*. **Gray Catbird**: three reports, one Stuyvesant 19 Dec (ADBC), one Vischer Ferry 9 Jan (DAB), one Niskayuna 6 Feb (NM). **Cedar Waxwing**: max 60 Castleton 13 Dec (PC). **N. Shrike**: only reports one Fort Edward 21 Feb (PS), one SARA 14 Jan (TC).

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER: *intro*. **Yellow-rumped Warbler**: a few wintering reports, one Stuyvesant 17 Dec (ADBC).

DICKCISSEL: *intro* (OW!). **Rufous-sided Towhee**: one Glenville 25 Jan (DAB) only report. **Am. Tree Sparrow**: more numerous than usual at banding locations in MONT and SCHE (RY). **Vesper Sparrow**: one SSCBC only report. **Savannah Sparrow**: two reports, three Coxsackie 17 Jan and 28 Feb (NM), three WASH 3 Jan (BP). **Fox Sparrow**: three reports, one Rexford SARA 6 Dec (DAB), one Kinderhook 14 Feb (ADBC), three Coxsackie 17 Jan (NM). **White-throated Sparrow**: max 145 Coxsackie/Athens 17 Jan (NM). **Lapland Longspur**: only reports one WASH 30 Jan and 5 Feb (BP), two Florida MONT 20 Feb (NM). **Snow Bunting**: max 190 Bethlehem ALBA 14 Feb (NM). **E. Meadowlark**: max seven Fort Edward 30 Jan (NM). **Purple Finch**: *intro* (AM) **House Finch**: *intro*. **Red Crossbill**: only reports 15 GREE 2 Jan, one ALBA 27 Jan (both DAB). **White-winged Crossbill**: five ACCBC only report. **European Goldfinch**: *intro*. **Pine Siskin**: not an invasion year, max 50 GREE 2 Jan (DAB), two at feeder in Petersburg through the period with increasing numbers in late Feb (AR), two Jenny L SARA 14 Feb (RY). **Evening Grosbeak**: only reports one Hague 26 Feb (LM), 20 at feeder Petersburg 6 Dec through end of period, five Schodack Center 10 Feb (PC).

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