

REGION 4 - SUSQUEHANNA

Mary Dobinsky

7 Spencer Drive, Oneonta NY 13820

Winter was a monstrous bully - mean, aggressive and forever. First the season elbowed its way in a month early to pelt Binghamton with 34 inches of snow, a November record. During each winter month thereafter, the powerful adversary hit with a variety of punches - snow, sleet, record cold, fierce winds and floods. Oneonta recorded 35.5 inches of snow the first 27 days of December, more than twice the normal amount. However, no snow fell the last four days of the month and temperatures moderated for that brief period, which was nice for BROO and TIOG Christmas Bird Counts. Average temperatures for December were 4.33°F colder than normal. Record cold temperatures dominated the first two weeks of January and most of the month's 31.60 inches of snow fell in that period, according to David Mattice, National Weather Service observer in Oneonta. Normal January snowfall is 17.9 inches. Mattice estimated 36 to 42 inches of snow on the ground 17 Jan when unseasonably warm temperatures and record rainfall over the next two days rapidly melted most of that snow cover, causing the devastating floods of 19 Jan. Several bridges and roads were closed after washouts and the Region was quickly declared a Federal Disaster Area. Total January precipitation was 4.86 inches, nearly twice the normal 2.54 inches. The mean temperature of 21.3°F for the month was two degrees colder than normal. Cold temperatures persisted through much of February with record lows on 4 and 6 Feb, but temperatures moderated the last 10 days and the only measurable snow after the 19 Jan flood was 1.7 inches on 14 Feb. Precipitation for the month was 1.57 inches, almost an inch below normal.

Winter weather conditions didn't target any particular bird species. They threatened them all, and, by early January, most birds had moved out. They were given a further push by the absence of wild foods. After last summer's drought, even trusty apples and crabapples were scarce, as were other fruits and berries, nuts, tree seeds, weed seeds.

There was little open water after mid December. American Black Duck and Mallard were scarce all period, but some uncommon individual ducks were reported and very high counts of all three merganser species were tabulated. Most raptors looked down on our forbidding snow cover and flew on. However, the Region had its first known winter reports of Merlin. It was a good year for Rough-legged Hawk, and Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper's Hawk, which favor small birds as prey, were often

reported near feeders. The mutilated carcass of a Golden Eagle was found in a ditch on Back River Road, Stamford DELA late February. The tail feathers and a leg had been removed from the bird, according to DEC biologists there. Further studies indicated the bird to be a young female with eggs, which might have been hit by a car at the scene or killed elsewhere and moved there.

Forced out of the woods in search of food, Wild Turkey adapted by flocking to manured fields and corn stubble. This made them more visible, of course, and might partly explain the record total of 2821 turkeys tabulated on the Region's five Christmas Bird Counts. The total quadruples the previous record of two years ago! Other birds seen this winter in high or near record numbers were American Coot, Mourning Dove, four species of owls reported, Red-bellied Woodpecker (for which range expansion is suspected), Horned Lark, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Shrike and Snow Bunting.

Three reports of Winter Wren were a noteworthy surprise, as were the first Bohemian Waxwing in at least 16 years. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a late Hermit Thrush, a single Eastern Bluebird, Gray Catbird and Eastern Meadowlark were among less hardy species reported in December. By early January, most areas reported that even birds normally common in winter became scarce. These included Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco and, especially, American Goldfinch. Winter finches were a disappointment. A few Pine Grosbeak were reported in CHEN, and Common Redpoll counts were good, but most Pine Siskin and Evening Grosbeak left the area in December. Missed species included Ring-necked Duck, Eastern Towhee, Common Grackle, Red Crossbill and White-winged Crossbill.

Observers: Cutler and Jeannette Baldwin, Les Bemont, Bruce Bozdos, Peg Burnett, Mary Ann Cuff, John Davis, Sadie Dorber, Harriet Dowdall, Mary Dobinsky, Tom Fernandez, Martha and Arthur Gregory, Bob Grosek, John Gustafson, Elva Hawken, Jim Hoteling, Sara Kinch, Hugh Kingery, Gail Kirch, Margaret Layton, Harriet Marsi, Andy Mason, George and Evelyn Mead, Bob Miller, R. Pantle, Marie Petuh, Tom Salo, Joe Sedlacek, Eric Sullivan, Tom & Norene Tasber, Bill Toner, Chris Vredenburg, D. Weber, Don Windsor, Irene Wright.

Abbreviations: BCBC - Broome Christmas Bird Count, 31 Dec; Can Res- Cannonsville Reservoir; ChCBC - Chenango Christmas Bird Count, 16 Dec; CoCBC - Cortland Christmas Bird Count 25 Dec; DCBC - Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count, 16 Dec; FMHW - Franklin Mt. Hawk Watch site; J City - Johnson City; TCBC - Tioga Christmas Bird Count 31 Dec; UL - Upper Lisle, BROO; WPR - Whitney Point Reservoir.

LOONS - DUCKS: **Com. Loon:** Susquehanna R Endicott 14 Jan, only report. **Pied-billed Grebe:** Otsego L. 18 Dec (JD), only report. **Great Blue Heron:** 22 on five CBCs; only two reports Jan: one Feb, scarce. **Snow Goose:** eight Endwell 20 Dec (ES), uncommon in winter. **Brant:** 120 FMHW 2 Dec, late flight. **Canada Goose:** many big flocks over FMHW early Dec; max 1098 ChCBC; 150 + all winter Owego (C&JB) and Greene (BB), otherwise scarce Jan, Feb. **Egyptian Goose:** Grippen Pk Endicott all season (MOB), escape. **Graylag Goose:** Chenango R Norwich 22, 26 Jan "after the flood" (DW), escape. **Wood Duck:** four on three CBCs; two OTSE 14 Jan (AM); singles BROO 20 Jan (BG); TIOG 29 Feb (G&EM), more than usual. **Am. Black Duck:** 98 on five CBCs; 133 on FWC; 28 Boland Pd BROO 23 Feb, low counts. **Mallard:** 755 On five CBCs, low count. **N. Pintail:** WPR 5 Dec (JH); two Cherry Valley OTSE 27 Dec (HK), uncommon in winter. **Gadwall:** Chenango R Norwich 11 Jan (DW), first winter since 1991. **Canvasback:** Susquehanna R Binghamton 14 Jan, often missed. **Redhead:** six Otsego L from 18 Dec (MOB); Chenango Forks 25 Dec (BG), often missed. **Lesser Scaup:** Boland Pd 27 Jan (ES), first in five years. **scaup (sp?):** three Susquehanna R OTSE 14 Jan. **Com. Goldeneye:** 48 Unadilla to Waverly Susquehanna R Jan, good count; singles TIOG Jan, BROO Feb (T&NT). **Bufflehead:** singles WPR and Long Pd 5 Dec (JH); Chenango R. Norwich 18, 19 Dec, always scarce. **Hooded Merganser:** max 19 on WFCs; five on two CBCs; two reports Jan, max five; one Feb, best count in five years. **Com. Merganser:** 135 on two CBCs; 226 on FWC; late winter max 46 Westover BROO 15 Feb (JH), excellent count. **Red-breasted Merganser:** 12 BCBC; pair UL 27 Feb (ES), high count.

HAWKS-ALCIDS: **Osprey:** BCBC, often missed. **Bald Eagle:** max 12 FMHW 2 Dec; W Burlington 27 Dec (TS); McGraw 25 Feb (TF); one/two reports a month from usual Delaware R areas, max four. **N. Harrier:** singles T Preston CHEN 6 Dec (EH); ChCBC; Endicott 14 Jan (SK), lowest count in nine years. **Sharp-shinned Hawk:** six reports Dec; five Jan; four Feb, mostly at feeders. **Cooper's Hawk:** 13 on three CBCs; five-six/month, often feeders. **N. Goshawk:** six on four CBCs; J City to 17 Dec (JH); none Jan, Feb. **Red-shouldered Hawk:** one BROO CBC, second successive winter, previously rare. **Red-tailed Hawk:** 89 on five CBCs, low count. **Rough-legged Hawk:** 20 on five CBCs; ten reports each month, max four, many dark phase, good count. **Golden Eagle:** *intro*; eight FMHW and one W Burlington 2 Dec, last migrants. **Am. Kestrel:** six on three CBCs; two singles Jan, Feb, average count. **Merlin:** BROO sites at

Westover 16 Dec (ES) and Port Dickinson 24 Dec (BG), first known Regional winter reports. **Ring-necked Pheasant**: one each on four CBCs; two W Burlington 31 Dec, 20, 24 Jan (TS); pair Davenport Center DELA 14 Jan (CV), good count. **Ruffed Grouse**: nine on four CBCs, scarce all season. **Wild Turkey**: intro; 2821 overall CBC total eclipses former high. **Am. Coot**: max 50+ Otsego L (MOB), high count second successive winter. **Killdeer**: arr Endwell 22 Feb (JS). **Ring-billed Gull**: max 11 CHEN 23 Feb (DW), scarce. **Herring Gull**: max 30 WPR and Long Pd CHEN 5 Dec (JH); scarce Jan, Feb. **Great Black-backed Gull**: six Mead Pd CHEN 23 Feb (DW), average count.

PIGEONS - WOODPECKERS: **Mourning Dove**: 1938 on five CBCs, record high count. **E. Screech-Owl**: nest box McGraw to 31 Dec; one dead McGraw barn 15 Jan (BT), same bird?; Wood Duck box Greene "voles and cardinal among prey found" (BB); singles BROO 14 Dec (MAC); second BROO site 9 Jan (SD); female T Preston 18 Dec, male there 19, 23 Dec, best count since 1991. **Great Horned Owl**: 23 on four CBCs mostly BROO, CHEN, high count. **Barred Owl**: singles UL 1 Dec (SK); ChCBC; TIOG Dec (JS); T Preston 1 Jan (EH), good count. **N. Saw-whet Owl**: Westover area BROO 14 Dec (MAC, MP, SK); feeder tray Oneonta home patio 12 Jan (HD), the owl had evidently caught a mouse there according to patterns in the snow found the next morning, only fourth report in 11 years. **Belted Kingfisher**: 12 on three CBCs, average. **Red-bellied Woodpecker**: 27 on four CBCs, three times best previous record, widespread reports through period, territorial expansion n and e indicated. **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**: BROO CBC third successive winter. **Downy Woodpecker**: 268 on five CBCs. **Hairy Woodpecker**: 97 on four CBCs. **N. Flicker**: two each ChCBC, BCBC; Vestal Center through period (SD), low count. **Pileated Woodpecker**: 21 on four CBCs, good count; male feeding on grapes near McGraw Porch late Jan (BT).

FLYCATCHERS-STARLINGS: **Horned Lark**: record 239 ChCBC; 40 TCBC; 40 n OTSE 27 Dec (HK); 20 BROO 10 Jan (ES); 40 Sherburne 14 Jan (DW); two small flocks Feb, excellent numbers. **Am. Crow**: 3691 on five CBCs; "big roost West Hill Norwich max 1100 on 6 Feb" (DW). **Fish Crow**: Owego daily Feb (C&JB), first winter since 1987. **Com. Raven**: Owego feeder 19 Dec (C&JB), at least one last four winters. **Black-capped Chickadee**: max 3196 on five CBCs, high count. **Tufted Titmouse**: 185 on four CBCs, third highest count in 16 years. **Red-breasted Nuthatch**: 91 on five CBCs; two-three daily at many feeders, good year. **Brown Creeper**: 23 on five CBCs, average. **Carolina Wren**: five on two CBCs, continues

scarce. **Winter Wren**: one CoCBC; pair Chenango Bridge suet feeder 12 Jan (T&AG); Westover 15 Jan (JH,ES), only second winter since 1984. **Golden-crowned Kinglet**: 57 on three CBCs mostly BROO, second highest count since 1984. **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**: six on two CBCs; one CHEN 2 Dec (EH), record winter count. **E. Bluebird**: BCBC, only one. **Hermit Thrush**: J City feeder 2 Dec (MP), only report. **Am. Robin**: 13 BCBC; TIOG Jan; arr Vestal 20 Feb (LB), scarce. **Gray Catbird**: CHEN CBC week, rare in winter. **N. Mockingbird**: ten on three CBCs; one TIOG Jan, Feb; Binghamton feeder after 4 Feb (ES), average count. **Bohemian Waxwing**: max 31 n of Cooperstown 4 Feb, "at top of large Ash in a stand of mature trees in an abandoned farm area; flock first seen 29 Dec" (JD), first report in at least 16 years. **Cedar Waxwing**: max 49 ChCBC; 15 Can Res 27 Jan; 30 Vestal 4 Feb, scarce. **N. Shrike**: 13 on four CBCs; T Preston 1 to 21 Dec max two (EH); nine other widespread reports Dec; CORT 1 Jan (JG); six singles Feb, record numbers. **Eur. Starling**: 4364 on CBCs, low.

TANAGERS-WEAVERS: **N. Cardinal**: 384 on CBCs, second only to record 440 two years ago; scarce most areas Jan, Feb. **Am. Tree Sparrow**: 364 on four CBCs, average for last five years. **Field Sparrow**: two TCBC, often missed. **Song Sparrow**: 22 on CBCs, good count; Norwich through period; five reports BROO Feb max eight. **Swamp Sparrow**: TCBC, only report. **White-throated Sparrow**: ten on two CBCs, scarce all winter. **Dark-eyed Junco**: 425 on CBCs, low; mid winter max 26 CORT 22 Jan (BT), scarce most areas. **Snow Bunting**: max flock 1,000 TIOG Jan (C&JB); 176 ChCBC; 200 W. Burlington 18 Dec, 15 Feb (TS) and CORT 15 Jan (BT), highest counts of last 16 years. **Red-winged Blackbird**: only one per month. **E. Meadowlark**: max four Deposit 16 Dec (ES,BG); three singles Dec, often missed. **Rusty Blackbird**: two TCBC, rare early winter. **Brown-headed Cowbird**: two reports Dec, max two; one Jan, scarce. **Pine Grosbeak**: max 24 C KBC; two reports Dec; two reports Jan; max 15 on 26 Jan, all CHEN. **Purple Finch**: 12 on three CBCs; none Feb, poor season. **House Finch**: 2184 on CBCs, good count; lower seasonal numbers. **Com. Redpoll**: 77 on three CBCs; increasing counts by late Jan max 60+ T Preston 15, 23 Feb (EH). **Pine Siskin**: nine BCBC; singles Vestal 2 Jan, 7 Feb (LB), scarce. **American Goldfinch**: 79 on three CBCs, scarce all season. **Evening Grosbeak**: 406 on three CBCs; late season max 75 T Preston 22 Feb (EH), scarce most areas.